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# EVE'S APPLES

STUDY OF AN EXCEPTIONAL  
GIRL'S TEMPERAMENT  
AND CHARACTER

*by*

HORACE ANNESLEY VACHELL

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TO MISS 1946  
I DEDICATE  
THIS BOOK

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## CHAPTER ONE

### I

WHEN THE GOLIGHTLY FAMILY—FATHER, MOTHER AND CHILD—lived in Gloucester Road, the quest of apples, luscious pippins, was a toast at the dinner-table. James Golightly—"Sunny Jim" to many friends—worked in the City. He delighted in surprise parties. He was at his best, so his little daughter thought, when he rolled up in a taxi soon after seven, bringing with him a couple of guests and a hamper. Eve loved to help Daddy to unpack the hamper. Out of it would come turtle soup from Painter's, a game pie or a galantine of chicken, a *croustade* of *foie-gras* and a large box of chocolates for the child. Champagne was brought from the cellar and gaily put into the refrigerator. Eve was invited to array herself in a party frock and appear with the dessert, expensive fruit from Solomon's in Piccadilly. Even the rigidly righteous will not be too shocked to learn that Eve was a snapper-up of crystallised apricots and dried cherries. She would say to Sybil, her mother, when detected, "I did find a cherry in my mouth, but I don't know how it comed there." Sunny Jim roared with laughter. The child, then six years old, knew that her father cuddled her when she was naughty, whereas her mother withheld caresses on that account.

Eve asked Sunny Jim why "Apples" were toasted. He had come to her bedroom to kiss her good night; he was sitting on the foot of the bed, in no hurry to leave, although a guest was still in the house.

"Apples," he said, "are rare and refreshing fruit."

"Not rare."

"Golden pippins are hard to get nowadays. Once upon a time, long, long ago, jolly fellows sailed the seas to find the golden beauties."

"What fun, Daddy, if—if they weren't seasick."

"Petlet, you've got it. Clever kid you are; and you get your wits from Mummie, not me. This hunt for apples is fun, great larks, fun, mind you, even if you don't get 'em. I must hop it."

"Stay just one minute longer."

"What a coxer!" he chuckled. "I say, it's naughty of me to tell you this, but in the City, you know, we play nearly all the time the good old game of *Beggar My Neighbour*. Sounds dreadful, eh? But I tell myself that my neighbours are out to beggar me; so it's fifty-fifty. When you're older you'll find out it's money makes the mare go, but the mare, if she's a beast of any spirit, makes the money go. Over your pate all this."

She clutched him as he bent down to kiss her.

"I'll tell you a secret. I love you to talk to me, I love the sound of your voice even if I don't understand all you say."

He moved to the door and turned, kissed the tips of his fingers and wafted the kiss to her, a ritual.

"How much do you love?" he asked.

"Ever so much."

"And you love your Daddy?"

"Best in the world."

## 2

Neighbours on the Stock Exchange beggared James Golightly, and how they drove him from wife and child must be recorded later on . . .

He returned to the drawing-room to find Sybil as serene as usual, but the guest, Sir Edward Popham, who had been his fag-master at Eton, was flushed of countenance.

"Edward and I, Jim, have agreed to disagree."

"About what, darling?"

"About sending Eve to a boarding-school when she's old enough to go."

"Her godfather ought to be consulted about that."

Sir Edward was a big man in every sense of the adjective, big of body, with a big, square head surmounting broad shoulders. He happened to be not merely a county magnate but a bold adventurer greatly interested in South America. He had been a stout friend to Golightly. Eve had been born in 1911; she was now nine years old, very happy at a day-school hard by.

"I say this, Jim, what is sauce for the little gander is sauce for the little goose. Sybil never went to a boarding-school so she has an unreasonable down on 'em."

"Sib has never been unreasonable in her life; and I know that her upbringing has made her the woman she is."

Sir Edward nodded. He had affection for Sybil and, in his

less robust moments, wished that his wife was as easy to live with as she.

"M'm . . . but what do *you* think about it?"

"My blessed old Popper, I live in the present; I can't peer ahead as you do. What's wrong with a good day-school?"

"Splits a girl in two. Often the kid unlearns at home what she learns at school."

"Or," Sybil suggested, "the other way about."

Jim smiled indifferently. Had he divined that this friendly altercation was destined to affect profoundly his little daughter, he might have paid more attention to it.

"A girl brought up at home, tied to her Mummie's apron-strings is damnably handicapped. She grows up different from other girls."

"I thank whatever gods there be that Sybil is different from the mothers who pack their brats off to school because they refuse to be bothered with the care of them. Also, I've no use for girls who dress alike, think alike and talk alike, throwing their tongues all over the shop."

"Two to one," said Sir Edward, pleasantly enough. "I must thank both of you for a jolly dinner."

He went his way.

Jim, after letting him out, returned to Sybil and lit the post-cigar pipe.

"Why," he asked, "was the old lad so hot in the collar about this boarding-school racket?"

Sybil had been born a Veal. All the members of her family were sensible folk, old-fashioned perhaps, stay-at-homes, contented with their station in life, staunch upholders of the middle class.

"His girls are at *Heathfield*."

"Are they? Yes; I'd forgotten. Look here, dearest, I'm a mug compared with you, but I've more than a hunch that they're happy at school because Lady Popham gives them hell at home."

"I barely know Lady Popham."

"If you had ever stayed at their barracks in the Midlands, you'd never want to know her."

"You were upstairs nearly a quarter of an hour. Did Eve ask you a question about the Head of your family?"

"No"—he frowned—"the kid doesn't know his name."

"She does. This morning at school, one of the teachers asked her if she was any relation to Lord Flamborough!"

He laughed.

"Alaric is my first cousin, although I've never met him; so the petlet is his first cousin, once removed. What did Eve tell the nosy-parker?"

"That she was no relation."

"Good. Leave it at that for the present."

He puffed at his pipe, not enjoying it.

## 3

Lack-a-day! The Honourable Arthur Golightly, Jim's father, had died a dishonoured man. In his quest for pippins he had gathered crab-apples. Seeking winners on the turf, he had found losers. After leaving Sandhurst, he was gazetted to the Grenadier Guards. Again and again his father had paid his debts. The end came suddenly. An irreclaimable "punter" backed a horse which won the race and was disqualified. Bets had to be paid. They were not paid. Arthur Golightly was a broken man. He left England, with his wife and son, and died in Florence. Fortunately for his son he had married the daughter of a rich stockbroker, senior partner in an old-established firm. Her money was settled upon her and Jim. Jim's grandfather, on the distaff side, saw to it that his grandson was sent to Eton. When the boy left Eton a stool was found for him in his grandfather's office, where he acquitted himself so creditably that in five years he became an authorised clerk. Later on his mother died; he inherited her small fortune and became a junior partner.

During 1910, he married Sybil Veal.

Stress must be laid on Jim's resentment against his family. The Golightlys went to Harrow. Jim met none of them at Eton. In fine, a cadet of a noble family believed himself to be permanently out of it. Lord Flamborough was a rich man; he could have saved his son from dishonour; he had mercilessly refused to do so.

## 4

Unable to enjoy his pipe, Jim let it go out.

"Popper," he said, "forgot one reason for sending Eve to a boarding-school. She would be in the country."

Veal sense dealt with this.

"London is healthy, Jim. Three weeks at the sea was the only change I had."

"I want Eve to be an out-of-door girl, good at games and all that."

"Yes, I'm hopeless at games."

He protested.

"You're a little wonder at everything else. If Eve grows up like you, there will be no complaints from me. Anyway, if I pick my apples, we'll do a swift bunk out of this and buy a snug manor-house in the West Country. I've set my heart on that, and," he laughed gaily, "I am speeding things up."

Sybil wondered if he was travelling at excess speed. He had described himself to her as clever "in streaks". She had loved, she still loved, his happy-go-lucky temperament. They had been separated for three dreary years. After their marriage they lived in a furnished flat in Green Street, where Eve was born. In 1914, when war broke out, Jim declared his intention of enlisting forthwith in his father's old regiment. However, Sybil, her relations and his partners urged him to wait awhile, as they were sure that the war would be over within six months. In June 1915, Jim joined a cadet corps, and was gazetted to a regiment serving in India. Here his cleverness in office work transferred him, most unwillingly, to work on the staff. He saw no active service and returned to London early in 1919. Meanwhile, Sybil had lost her father, who bequeathed her some £15,000, settled on herself with reversion to her children. With it went the house in Gloucester Road, which had belonged to a Victorian aunt. In June of the same year Jim foolishly sold his interest in the stockbroking firm and started business with a get-rich-quick Jew. For a few months Strauss & Golightly prospered. But Sybil was aware that Fortune was now holding out her left hand. Jim, however, said gaily, "If I lose a packet one day, darling, I get it back within a week."

Jim had relit his pipe and was smiling.

She said gently:

"For Eve's sake I hope with all my heart that your dream will come true."

## 5

How seldom dreams come true.

In mid-July 1922, soon after luncheon, Jim rang up Sybil. His voice was reassuring.

"I have to cross tonight from Southampton to Havre. No time to rush home. I've a few things here. Popham will call

about four. He'll tell you why I'm off so suddenly. Much love to you and the petlet."

She replaced the 'phone. Jim, who spoke French fluently, might have been despatched to France to transact business for Sir Edward. At four she was alone with him in the drawing-room; Eve was at school. One glance at a kindly face sufficed. Before he spoke her heart sank within her.

"Jim," he began stiffly, "asked me to break bad news. Be brave, Sybil, I—I tell you that matters might have been much worse. I took the responsibility of insisting, *insisting*, that Jim should leave England. He's a gallant fellow. He wanted to stay and face the music. I told him to think of you and his child."

"I trust you, Edward; you are Jim's best friend. I shall listen quietly."

"You're one in a thousand. That fellow Strauss has bolted, taking with him every bob he could lay his hands on. We don't know where he has gone; it is humanly certain he will not come back. Jim came to me. Strauss was a crook; and Jim didn't know it."

"I did, Edward, but never have I heard my husband say an unkind word about anybody. When I warned him, he laughed at me."

"Just what Sunny would do. But ignorance is no excuse in the eyes of the law; a partner is responsible for what his partner does or leaves undone. You have money of your own in settlement?"

"Yes, but——"

"The firm's creditors can't touch that. Jim is penniless. Luck, I tell you, has not entirely forsaken him. He has you; he has me. You, Sybil, would have urged him not to waste one minute. I saw him off at Waterloo; he is now on his way to Southampton. You know that; he promised me to tell you."

"He did."

"I cannot go into details which you couldn't understand. Jim has many friends. It is unlikely that steps will be taken against him. He will be reported to the Committee of the Stock Exchange as "wounded and—missing". I have friends on that Committee and I shall assume full responsibility for what I have done. We try, so far as possible, not to wash dirty linen in public. Had Jim stayed, publicity would have been intolerable for you."

Her serenity amazed him. He saw in front of him a woman

of medium height, of slender build, finely proportioned. She was neither dark nor fair, no beauty, but richly prepossessing, exceptionally so. Her umber eyes, so steadily fixed on his, were set well apart beneath straight brows. Her hair was auburn. She used little make-up. John Sargent, not Lazzlo, would have revealed character, had he painted her portrait. Forehead, cheeks, chin, nose and lips were not, taken separately, likely to arrest attention; it was the symmetry of the whole which delighted the critical eye.

Her silence was more impressive than any speech. She held her head erect, as he went on:

"I have interests in Paraguay, much of it undiscovered country."

"Jim is going to Paraguay. Oh-h-h!"

For an instant he feared she would break down. Instead, she said valiantly:

"I want to go with him."

"My dear, it's impossible."

"Why?"

"He will lead an expedition into the interior. If he accomplishes what I believe he will, why then," he smiled grimly, "he will come back with his apples."

"Come back to me?"

"Trailing clouds of glory behind him. By that time, say six months, all will be forgiven and forgotten."

"No woman could endure the hardships?"

"I repeat—impossible."

"Will he be able to write?"

"Not after he reaches the jungle."

"The jungle."

She closed her eyes. Compassion constrained an honest man to lie.

"I should have said the Forest. The caravan will be well equipped. I can only add this: Jim was mad keen to go. He will travel from Havre to Buenos Aires."

Most women would have asked questions. Sybil's intuition may have told her that Jim's friend would not answer them. But Jim would write to her at length. She thanked her visitor, who hurried away, after minimising the truth and relying on her intelligence.

She sat still, attempting to analyse her reactions. She had been tempted to say, "Edward, it's very kind of you to leave unsaid what you knew would hurt me, but I know that Jim has



left England as—as his father did.” And he would have replied, “No, no, it isn’t as bad as that; Jim, I’ll swear, has been more sinned against than sinning.” That she believed to be true. He was mad keen to go. . . . He had been mad keen to join up in 1914. . . . No woman could go with him. . . . Was she sure that in India he had been faithful to her? There might have been lapses. . . . Still, she smiled pathetically, his love had never failed when they were together. They had married for love; the greatest thing in the world had been theirs. . . .

When Eve came back from school Sybil fibbed; Daddy had gone to France on important business; soon he would return. The child replied, “He’s after apples, isn’t he?”

## 6

Three days later Eve received a letter.

*My own Petlet,*

*I am aboard a great big ship. Soon we shall weigh anchor; and Mum and you won't hear again from me until I reach Buenos Aires, which is in South America. Take great care of Mummie whilst I'm away. There's a chance that you two may be living in the country, near your Aunt Fanny, when I get back. I love to think of you as an open-air nymph. I send a fat kiss to Mum. Be sure to give it to her.*

*Ever and always, your loving  
Daddy.*

Sybil read this letter. Faith in a merciful Providence fortified her. Tears were streaming down Eve's cheeks. It was significant that Jim had written to Eve. Obviously the letter was intended for her; the suggestion of living near Aunt Fanny, his wish that Eve should become an open-air nymph. Being an exceptional woman, she understood that her husband, like Sir Edward, had spared her the lamentable truth . . .

“When will he come back?” Eve asked.

“Not for some months, darling.”

“I—I can’t live without him. He was always so sweet to me.”

“Ah, yes; he was sweet to both of us, but . . .”

She paused, disconcerted by her thoughts, resurrecting the gay lover whom she had married against her father's wishes.

"Go on, Mum," Eve entreated.

"I must go back. No, no, you are not old enough to understand. The wish to please is in you as it is in him. It's a gift. Sometimes it's a dangerous gift, because the wish to please everybody may be selfish——"

"Selfish?"

"If—if," she tried to pick the right words, "if at the back of it you wish only to please yourself, to be popular. It pays to be popular. Nobody can resist the man or woman who is the life and soul of a party. Did it ever strike you as odd that often I dined by myself?"

"I thought parties bored you."

"They do sometimes. Daddy was a welcome guest in houses where I felt out of it. I couldn't pay my shot, as he would say. Never have I talked to you like this——"

"I'm ever so interested."

"Your father was extra sweet to you because you are so like him, so responsive. . . ."

Eve was arrested, challenged, slightly bewildered. She found herself uneasily sensible that no compliment had been paid to her. They were sitting on a sofa in the too prim drawing-room. Eve took her mother's hand and gripped it.

"I want to be sweet to you," she whispered. "You are good. Am I a disappointment because I'm like Daddy? Did I love him so much because he never scolded me? Anyway, he's in a big ship and you're here. Shall we stay here?"

"No; we can't afford to live on here. We must find, as Daddy suggests, a cottage in the country near a good school, near Guildford."

"Because Aunt Fanny lives near Guildford?"

"Yes."

Aunt Fanny, Mrs. Crampton, was Sybil's elder eister, the childless widow of a City of London alderman, who lived in comfort, disdaining luxury, at *The Gables*, a mansion of gentility on the Hog's Back, near the village of Limpley.

"Has Daddy lost his money?"

"Yes."

"Has he gone away because he's 'swingled' somebody?"

Jim played "Rummy" with Eve. He had taught her "Miss Milligan" and other Patiences. He laughed when the child cheated. She was seven when she admitted that she "swingled". The mispronunciation of the word became a family joke.

"Why do you ask that question?"

"Because a girl at school asked me if he had. I wanted to bite her."

"It will be fun finding a cottage."

"You'll take me with you?"

"To be sure I shall."

## 7

Next day, Sybil betook herself to Old Square, Lincoln's Inn Fields, to a cousin, John Veal, who was also her solicitor. Sir Edward had enlightened him. Probably he wished to make things as easy as possible for a plucky kinswoman.

"Got out of Queer Street, Sybil. . . . Only thing to do. Popham, good fellow, has 'grub-staked' him."

"Grub-staked?"

"Common expression in the Wild West. Popham has given him a fresh start. Now, about you? Thank God you have your money and a roof over your head."

"I've only a life interest in the money, but the house is mine, isn't it?"

"It is."

"I must sell it. Can you do this for me?"

"Certainly I can. I intended to suggest that. Easy as kiss hands. What a wise little piece you are. Leave the sale to me."

"I came to you first, John. Tomorrow I shall see Frances."

"Good! Sensible woman. She may ask you to live with her."

"John, dear, I'm afraid she will."

John Veal laughed. In his opinion Frances was intimidating. However, he hastened to assure Sybil that she would do well to refuse such an invitation if it were made. Next day, to Sybil's great relief, no such offer was made. Mrs. Crampton soared to heights. It may have been a satisfaction to her to learn that what she had apprehended had come to pass. The Veals had no faith in good looks. Dear to them was the tag *Handsome is as handsome does*. More, they gave a twist to another tag, affirming that dirty linen, even if washed in private, was unmentionable. No unkind criticism of her brother-in-law passed her firmly compressed lips. The outstanding fact sufficed: James Golightly had lost his money and was on the high seas.

"I shall make this my business, Sybil. John will sell your house; the sooner you're out of it, the better. I shall find a

suitable cottage near me. I happen to know of one. I commend your wish to send Eve to a day-school. Not far from the cottage I have in my eye is *Highbury*. My old friend, Miss Poindexter, will be glad to have my niece as a day-boarder. Leave that to me."

"Ought I to buy any cottage till I've sold my house?"

"That's as maybe; a bargain, if it is a bargain, must be snapped up."

Within a week Sybil and Eve saw the cottage, which crowned a small hill within a quarter of a mile of Limpley Church. It was severely rectangular, challenging attention from the passer-by with its plaster and timber, its latticed windows and one finely proportioned chimney-stack rising from a roof of stone tiles, a roof projecting boldly at its eaves. The walls of the interior were also built of plaster and timber. Ceilings were supported by rough joists of oak. No poor man had lived in it. A gentleman of means had bought a meadow for a few pounds. Then he had gone to a famous designer of small houses. "I covet," he had said, "a week-end cottage which you must design for me. I'm prepared to spend fifteen hundred pounds on it and I give you a free hand." The architect had busied himself during many years rehabilitating old cottages; he bowed his knee to honest craftsmanship. He displayed photographs of Sussex cottages before and after treatment. One, in particular, known as the *Priest's House*, took his client's fancy. "Build me something like that," he had said. Within six months the cottage was built. A pergola was added; honeysuckle and ramblers were planted and the cottage was named *Honeysuckle*. A local wag suggested *Lady Gay Spanker*. The mistress of a new cottage which looked so respectably old was gay. Sounds of revelry by night raised bristles on the Hog's Back. Within two years the revels came to an end.

To the confounding of Sybil and Eve, the price demanded by a Guildford agent was prohibitively high.

## 8

Jim wrote to Sybil from Buenos Aires.

*Blessedest,*

*Within a few days I shall be in the Chaco. I wrote to Eve instead of to you because I hoped that your resentment against me*

would ooze out of you. I'd mucked up everything. Crossing to Havre, I nearly threw myself into the Channel. Edward is indeed a friend. Here they look on him as a sort of Railroad King. He has his finger in many pies. The Jesuits buried gold somewhere in Paraguay. Where did they find it? We shall travel by water. I have with me a sort of Chief of Staff, a map-maker from Montevideo, who is teaching me Spanish. The others are picked men. We are well armed, but the Inditos in the Chaco are said to be inoffensive beggars, living, of course, a primitive life. I feel very fit, Sib, but I miss you and Eve horribly. The Paraguayans keep their good wives and daughters more or less in purdah. If a stranger smiles at one of them he gets a knife in his back! I'm sure your sister Frances will do what she can although she'll can what she can't. Darling, I kiss your feet, as they say here. I'm unworthy to kiss your hands.

*I enclose a note for the Petlet.*

*Ever and always,  
Jim.*

He wrote to Eve:

*My Petlet,*

*I'm off to the land where the Bong Tree grows. Do you remember when I gave you ten bob to learn The Owl and the Pussycat? I'm sailing away in a beautiful green boat. I shall come back, and then hand in hand we'll dance on the strand, and live together happily for ever after.*

*Mum, I 'spect, has told you that her old Jim got Jim-jams. On the Stock Exchange, instead of apples I gathered brickbats. I left it because I might have been hammered out of it. You are old enough to be told this, but keep it to yourself.*

*Millions of kisses from your Loving  
Daddy.*

Presently Eve asked her mother a question.

"What does 'hammering' mean?"

They were at the breakfast table. Sybil picked up a knife. Three times, pausing between each stroke, she struck the tablecloth with the handle. She spoke gently. "Mr. James Golightly is unable to meet his obligations." She laid down the hammer.

"What are obligations, Mum?"

"What we owe to others and also what we owe to ourselves. Daddy tried to do too much. Finish your milk."

Soon afterwards Sybil had three pleasant surprises in swift succession. John Veal sold her house at a fair price. Sybil and Eve were invited to stay at *The Gables*. No quest began for another cottage.

"*Honeysuckle Cottage* is yours, my dear. I made a firm offer for it, two-thirds of the price asked. It was accepted. I paid in full. The title deeds in your name are now with John Veal."

"I—I don't know what to say, Fanny."

"Tch! Give me a kiss and say nothing."

Eve smothered Mrs. Crampton with kisses.

"That will do, darling. Now we must change the name. The honeysuckles are dead."

"I thought of a name as soon as I saw it—*Meadowsweet*," said Sybil.

"Yes, yes, ra—ther nice! *Meadowsweet* belongs to the *Spiraea* family."

"It has another name—*Queen of the Meadows*."

Eve said:

"Auntie, did you know the people who lived in the cottage?"

"I never called on them. Run along, child, and tell Millie that you are going to live near me."

Millie was the parlourmaid, a faithful retainer. Alone with Sybil, Mrs. Crampton went on austere:

"Those week-enders defamed the moral currency of the realm. The man lived with a lady who was not his wife. The cottage must be disinfected. I have another little surprise for you, Sybil. I have seen Miss Poindexter. She and her sister, Miriam, will be happy to receive Eve as a day-boarder at the beginning of the next Term. Pray don't ask me their terms. Eve's school fees, till she comes out, will be my affair."

"You generous soul! Really I don't know how to thank you."

"I propose to share with you the right upbringing of Eve. I have to ask one question. Our dear child hopes that her father will come back. Do you?"

"Yes, yes. He won't come back empty-handed. He ran away, but he isn't a coward. Win or lose, he will remain Sunny Jim to the last."

"He is beyond my horizon. Outwardly he was the most attractive man I've ever met."

## IO

Within three weeks Sybil was installed in her cottage. She and Eve enjoyed furnishing it. Mrs. Crampton was fifteen years older than Sybil and very set in her ways. She talked to Eve frankly.

"Your dear mother, like myself, is a born and bred Londoner. She is not a chameleon."

"A chameleon is a sort of lizard, isn't it?"

"Yes; a reptile. It can change its colour. Do you know anything of Natural History?"

"I don't."

"Live and learn. There are, so I read somewhere, bumps and spots on a chameleon which reflect light and colour. On a green leaf the little lizard appears green, on a brown leaf, he looks brown. Why are you giggling?"

"Because I remember a girl telling me that if you put a chameleon on a Scotch plaid he busts."

"Bursts, darling, not busts."

"Sorry."

"The point I wish to stress is this: your mother has never lived in the country, but, happily, she is adaptable as I am. Women have to be. Your uncle Thomas and I lived in Cumberland Place, but when his health failed we moved here. If your mother had nobody to consider but herself, she would live in a service flat. She is cutting loose from many friends, but my friends here will be her friends."

"You are wonderful, marvellous. I know I shall love the country."

Dinner at *Meadowsweet* was served in the middle of the day. No servants "lived in". Mrs. Crampton engaged as cook a middle-aged woman, Mrs. Tagg, who lived in an adjoining cottage; she arrived each morning at eight and left at six in the afternoon. Another near neighbour functioned as "charlady"; Ellen Chubb did her work in three hours. Twice a week, another neighbour, a cheery old fellow, worked leisurely in the neglected garden.

Sybil, perhaps, set an inordinate value on security. She was now secure in her ownership of a charming home. On the other hand, she had to share the responsibility of bending a twig with her sister.

Would Eve accept the authority and discipline of two mothers?

## CHAPTER TWO

## I

THE MISSES POINDEXTER, JOINT MISTRESSES OF A SCHOOL WHICH Mrs. Crampton accepted as the right training ground for her niece, were gentlewomen. Jane Austen might have labelled them "Grave and Gay" or "Sense and Sensibility". Together they made a working team, although their best work was accomplished out of the class-rooms; the elder sister dealt with minds, the younger with bodies. The elder of the pair, Penelope, spoken of behind her back as "Prof", was more prophet than professor. On the school prospectus the curious read that she was a sometime Exhibitioner of Somerville College, Oxford. But she never posed as a blue-stocking. None the less, she was perhaps too keen on scholarship, wasting no time with dullards, giving attention to the few, if they responded to treatment, if they had . . . character. Miss Miriam, the younger sister, had been nicknamed "Mim". Mim was aware that the few were overworked: minds—although she dared not say so—were expanded at the expense of bodies. Health to her was all-important . . .

*Highmount* was a late Georgian mansion approached by a drive through a tiny park. Parents were impressed. . . . The small domain was kept in apple-pie order. If they stayed to tea, it was heartening to be told by Miss Miriam that the butter, the cream, the appetising little cakes were home products. Inspection of the premises surpassed expectation. Obviously, pride of place was accorded to the boarders; they occupied the best rooms; they had the "run" of the garden; they had their share of hothouse grapes and peaches! On such occasions, Mim presided at the tea-table and did the honours. Her sister would nod from time to time. Sooner or later, she would say pleasantly: "No *Highmount* girl suffers from claustrophobia." And then Mim would say: "That is the big idea. This is not a finishing school, but the girls must come *out* some day. So my sister and I want to make even the little ones feel that they are not . . . not . . ."

"Cribbed, cabined and confined," added the senior partner.

At the beginning of each term, the sisters, as soon as their pupils were in bed, would exchange views concerning the newcomers. Mim admitted that appearances counted with her; Miss Poindexter withheld judgment.



"The pick of the pottle, Miriam, is this niece of Mrs. Crampton's. For her age she strikes me as very intelligent."

"Well, we must make allowances. London schools are . . . are . . . How would you describe them, Pen?"

"Hotbeds of precocity."

"They are."

The sisters were in a small, booklined room with french windows overlooking the playing-fields, never spoken of as the campus. On Penelope's desk were a pair of field-glasses. It is significant that she used these to keep in touch (at a discreet distance) with the players of games. Miriam was Games Mistress. Through her glasses Penelope studied character. She awarded top marks to a good loser. She took note of bickerings.

"Golightly," Mim went on, "tells me that she's a rabbit at games, but keen, very keen. One day she may be a star——"

"You didn't tell her so?"

"Of course I didn't."

"Do you expect her to twinkle in your firmament or mine?"

"Why not in both?"

"Her aunt," said the senior partner, after a pause, "told me that Golightly's father, now in South America, is a cousin of Lord Flamborough, but she asked me to keep that to myself."

"How very odd! We're not snobs . . ."

"We're curious. See if you can find him in *Burke*. Mrs. Crampton's maiden name was Veal. If a Golightly married a Veal——"

Miriam suppressed a chuckle. If a Golightly, she reflected, did marry a de Vaux nobody could take exception to such an alliance. Promptly she obeyed her sister. *Who's Who* and the Bible compiled by Ulster King of Arms had a small table to themselves. Pages were turned reverentially.

"Yes, Pen, he is here. James Golightly, the grandson of the seventh earl, married Sybil Veal, daughter of Henry Veal of . . . of London. No mention of our pupil, but our peerage was bought at least ten years ago."

She replaced the tome and reseated herself, surprised to notice a smile on Penelope's face.

"This pleases you, Sister?" she asked.

"It does. It . . . it allays, banishes, a natural apprehension. Mrs. Golightly lives in a cottage with a stigma attached to it. The former mistress was not the owner's wife although she called herself by his name. All is very well, but . . ."

"Yes?"

"Why are we to keep what we know to ourselves? Why is Mr. Golightly in South America? Is Mrs. Golightly a grass widow or is she separated from her husband? None of our business, but we've overlooked Tremayne."

"Tremayne?"

"Her grandmother was born Lady Augusta Golightly."

"Then the two girls are cousins."

"And don't know it."

"Tremayne," said Mim, "is not one of our stars. She believes that God made Adam and Eve and the Tremaynes. When I was her age I didn't know the maiden name of our grandmother."

"You would have known it, Miriam, had she been the daughter of a Knight of the Garter. Let that pass. I repeat, this is none of our business."

"Quite . . . Quite. Have you made any entry in the Book?"

The Book was a ledger, handsomely bound, with a title *Lest We Forget*, a Christmas present to Pen from Mim when the sisters, greatly daring, took *Highmount* on a long lease. It was a *memoria technica*. It might have been entitled *Character Studies*. Pen spoke of it as a dossier. In it she set down passing comments and predictions. For example, on the page awarded to Gillian Callow, the first entry brought a smile to Pen's lips whenever she glanced at it. "Callow, I fear, will not be with us for more than one term." And yet, Callow had remained at *Highmount* for five years . . .! More, her dossier was a crescendo sonorously swelling from bad conduct to good. She had become in due time a . . . STAR.

"I have written three lines, Miriam."

"Please read them to me."

"This little Eve," read Miss Poindexter, "looks as if she had been born in the Garden of Eden before the Fall. It is difficult to believe that she is her mother's daughter or her aunt's niece."

"Not quite like you, Sister, to write that."

"You think it—slushy? Perhaps it is. Her wits rather than her looks captivated me. We had the usual talk. I told her that we tried to teach our girls to teach themselves, and so on and so forth. . . . She listened attentively. To my surprise she said, 'I have such a lot to unlearn.'"

"Surprising . . .!"

"M'm . . . She may be an echo of mother or aunt."

"What has the child got to unlearn?"

"Is she old enough to distrust preconceived ideas? I . . . I wish she were a boarder. So often our stitches are unpicked."

"Her mother won't unpick them."

"Why are you so sure of that?"

"Because I took Mrs. Golightly to the gym and showed her our tennis courts. She is a creature of reserves. She admitted that Eve needed plenty of fresh air and exercise. And then she hinted that the child had been spoiled by her father."

No more was said.

## 2

Ownership of the cottage constrained Sybil Golightly to sell her shabby, too solid furniture. Eve, you may be sure, entreated her to do so. Eve had made the happiest suggestion.

"The cottage is new but it looks old. Your mahogany side-board would look ridiculous. We ought to have a dresser. I've a brain-wave, darling. Let's take a photograph of the cottage to Jarrod's and show it to one of the Heads. I read an 'ad'. *You buy a cottage and we will furnish it for you.* Daddy used to say it was so stupid to do for oneself what somebody else could do better for you. Jarrod's will tell you what it will cost. Then you'll know where you are."

"Are you repeating something you heard your father say?"

"Yes; I am. When we had our 'beyondy' talks he thrilled me. It's simply too wonderful that we have our dream cottage and—and when he comes back to it, you'd like him to be pleased, wouldn't you?"

"Yes. Did he talk about furnishings?"

"'Course he did. He loves what I love; everything fresh and chintzy, a gay little parlour, wood fires, lots of lavender in the linen closet, a great big bowl full of rose-leaves."

"I have a recipe for *pot-pourri*. I've never had the rose-leaves to make it."

"I know you hate to part with things that belonged to Veals."

Mrs. Golightly sighed, half-closing her eyes, honest enough to admit to herself that she couldn't cope with a gay little parlour. Jarrod's could do it . . .

Jarrod's did do it, admirably and not too expensively.

## 3

Earlier in the evening when Miss Poindexter read aloud the first entry on a virgin page, Eve, after high-tea, sat on a stool at her mother's feet and delivered her "budget".

"I'm ever so happy, Mum. The girls, even the big ones, have been so decent, although I am a fly-by-night."

"Where did you get hold of that word?"

"That's what the boarders call us. Does it mean anything nasty?"

"Not to you. Are you glad or sorry to fly home?"

"I'm glad to come back to you. What does 'rank outsider' mean?"

Mrs. Golightly smiled. To Sunny Jim it meant almost every man who had not had a public-school education. She murmured evasively:

"You live outside *Highbury*, so you are an outsider. Rank, as an adjective, means smelly."

"One of the new girls, a day-boarder, is smelly and an idiot——"

"Really? An idiot?"

"Because she let out that she had only one bath a week on Saturday night. That just tore it for her. Another new day-boarder reeked of cheap scent. She caught it from Mim, I mean Miss Miriam. I like her most awfully, so maty; but I mustn't try to be maty with the boarders till they take notice of me. And, Mum, I shall be dead lag of the school at games. Made-moiselle says my French accent is not too bad; and I'm the youngest in my form. Soppy girls and cry-babies have a rotten time. What is a budgerigar?"

"A little love-bird. Why do you ask?"

"Well, girls are called by their surnames or nicknames. A boarder said to me, 'Hullo, Budgie.' She said Budgie was short for budgerigar, and popped off."

"If she called you Budgie, she liked you."

"I liked her. If anybody called me 'Evie' I should spit at them. At your school were you called Veal?"

"No. I was a day-boarder, as you are. We had no games. Most of the girls were daughters of tradespeople. I hate to say it, but a girl whose father owned a big shop looked down on a girl whose father worked in a shop. My father was a builder, as you know; I hope I didn't give myself airs, but I tried to be genteel, a word your father hated. I was certainly soppy——"

"I don't believe it."

"Sentimental. I loved the novels of Charles Garvice, who sold by the ton. You see, nearly all my girl friends chattered about the men they hoped to marry, just as girls chatter today about the heroes of the screen. Dear me! Am I boring you?"

"You couldn't. You're talking as Daddy talked. May be you're doing that because you know how I miss him?"

This innocent remark sped home. The naïve truth made the mother wince. As yet she was unable to analyse her feelings or measure the loss she had sustained. It was imperative that Eve should cherish memories of a father who was a hero to her. There is something intimately personal which every woman knows. When a wife wrongs her husband, she begins to hate him even if she is unaware of it. When a husband is unfaithful to his wife, he may go on loving her.

"Carry on, Mum; tell me more about yourself. Did you fall in love with Daddy before you met him?"

"Perhaps I did . . . Yes; I know I did. You are not as honest as—as I pray—you will be."

"Help——!"

The situation was poignant to Sybil. She recalled a chance remark of Jim's. At the time, she was reading aloud to Eve a Victorian classic entitled *Susy's Six Teachers*. Her mother had read it aloud to her. To her dismay Eve said brightly: "I hate *Mr. Pain*; I love *Miss Joy*." Jim's comment was significant. "Bless her! She loves *Miss Joy*. So do I." He chuckled, adding slyly: "Mummie will have to do the dirty work. I'm sure twigs loathe being bent. I shall leave the bending to you, darling." He had.

Sybil, picking her words, went on:

"You repeat what you read or overhear as if it were your own. It's true that girls fall in love with their ideals. How did you, a mere child, find that out?"

"I read it in a Sunday paper, so it must be true. How did it go? . . . A very clever woman gives advice to girls and answers questions. . . . It was snappy. 'Don't expect to meet the lover of your dreams. He doesn't exist.'"

"You have a good memory. I'm glad you read this; it's disconcertingly true. But you ought to have told me it wasn't your own."

"Sorry."

Eve, after an exciting day, lay awake for an hour. So did her mother. Mrs. Golightly was nearly as sensible as Mrs. Crampton. All the Veals were sensible. The women of the family deplored the shrieking sisterhood who had achieved publicity and recognition. Sybil could hear Jim saying, "Damn petticoat government!" He might have said it to his daughter. If Jim never came back, Eve, during the five years ahead of her, would be

under the thumbs of four women: Mrs. Crampton, the Misses Poindexter and herself. Now and again Sybil was assailed by misgivings: vague apprehensions that Upsidonia might upset her apple-cart. Jim, of course, said absurd things, not maliciously, but intending (as indeed he admitted) to pull legs hitherto hidden from the roving masculine eye. At one of his surprise parties, shortly before he vanished, a guest had asked him if he had found the right school for Eve. The Merry Widow, perhaps, inspired his answer: "I think you fellows will agree with me. If boys went to schools run by women, and *vice-versa*, it might be a change for the better." Then, smiling at his wife, egged on by the other men, he had embroidered his theme. He did not advocate co-education. But he regretted the passing of the *Dames* at Eton, citing the incomparable Miss Evans as an example. As an experiment, the headmistress of Roedean might exchange chairs with the headmaster of any big public school. What would happen? Boys would not forget their mothers; girls would not forget their fathers . . .

Before she fell asleep Sybil hugged to her bosom Hope's anchor. She was reasonably sure that Eve would be happy at *Highmount*.

## 4

From day to day, as the months sped by, this hope burgeoned. No word came from Paraguay. But the Old Etonian who had befriended Jim came to *Meadowsweet* and asked for a cup of tea. As he stepped out of his car Sybil nearly swooned. He had, no doubt, bad news for her. She opened the front door. The visitor smiled reassuringly. Alone with her in the panelled parlour, he said pleasantly:

"I should have come before, but I gave you time to settle in. What a charming cottage!"

"You are here, Edward, because you have heard from Jim."

Slightly taken aback, he murmured:

"Because I have not heard. Have you? You haven't. That need not distress you. He is pushing his way into country off the map. I have faith in him."

"Clever of you," he said presently, "to buy an old cottage. Bungalows seem to be built for one night only."

"It's the copy of an old Sussex cottage."

"You have furnished it delightfully."

"Jarrod's did that."

"Where is the ewe lamb?"

"At school. She will be back soon after six."

"I must leave before that. But I'll come again. Does Eve miss her daddy?"

"Not quite so much as she did. She's happy at school and popular."

"I'm sure she is. My congratulations."

"On what?"

"I have two daughters. Have you a down on fagging?"

"Fagging?"

"Jim was my fag at Eton. It's grand discipline with the gospel of service to others behind it. If I ask one of my girls to do a small service, does she do it? Not she. She rings the bell for a servant. That can't go on much longer. My pre-war staff is cut in two."

"I have two servants who live out. I'm glad they do. Eve makes her own bed and does her room. Do you call that fagging?"

"I do."

"Tell me more about your girls."

"They're out for a good time all the time. They believe in that as they used to believe in Father Christmas; they would crawl up a chimney to get it."

"What can you do about it?"

"Not a thing. We wriggle along somehow."

Lady Popham had never called on Sybil. Jim, who had been best man at his fag-master's wedding, spoke of her as Paprika: an agreeable condiment (when fresh) not as hot as cayenne. Periodically her portrait embellished *The Tatler*. Each year Jim spent an invigorating fortnight stalking the tall red deer on Sir Edward's forest. After the London season Lady Popham demanded a rest cure. Jim was of opinion that a stag-party in the Highlands was exactly right. He described her ladyship as "the sort of female who insists that a poor devil should play poker after a hard day on the hill. Not your sort, nor mine."

Sir Edward took affectionate leave of Mrs. Golightly. If he were puzzled, he kept it to himself. He had asked if he could be of any help to her; she had replied: "You have done too much already." Accordingly, he went his ways determined to see more of her. "Plucky as they make 'em," he reflected. "Not a whimper; and still sweetly good-looking, no blasted make-up." Make-up, if overdone, exasperated him. During the ardours of the honeymoon, his bride spent a full hour each night rubbing

in face-creams, massaging her skin, brushing her hair, and doing physical "jerks". She had her reward. She had kept her school-girl complexion.

Eve, on her return from *Highmount*, pouted. Sir Edward might have stayed on half an hour. She recalled him imperfectly as Daddy's best friend, who had bought her a rocking-horse. He was her godfather and an authentic swell.

"Did he speak of me as his godchild?" she asked.

"No."

"I'll bet he's forgotten that I am."

"He brought a box of chocs for you. There it is."

"Charbonnel and Walker. What a darling! He told you he hadn't heard from Daddy——"

"Why do you take for granted that he hasn't."

"If Daddy could write, he'd write to me or—or you."

"Sir Edward thinks no news is good news. If the expedition had failed, your father would have hurried back to Montevideo."

"That's a cert. You must help me to write a top-hole letter. Shall I begin, 'Dear Goddie'?"

"God forbid! He has promised to come again. He is very interested in you. He talked about his girls."

"How I'd love to meet them!"

"You can have three chocs. You mustn't spoil your appetite for tea; it will be ready in a few minutes. I have some potted shrimps for you. Pop off and wash your hands."

"Did Sir Edward bring a present for you?"

"A brace of pheasants."

"Why haven't we more friends like him?"

"That will do. Hop it."

## 5

Friends of Mrs. Crampton and mothers of other day-boarders called upon Mrs. Golightly. They were more or less cut to pattern: good churchwomen, parochial in their outlook, the wives, for the most part, of strivers rather than thrivers. Eve once more surprised her mother when she repeated a comment made by Miss Miriam: "By their cars ye shall know them." Eve, with a tincture of her father's humour, said: "We must hang our heads, Mum, till we buy a baby bus."

She had a bicycle on which she rode to and from *Highmount* in all weathers. Her mother was content to remain a "hiker",



taking a 'bus when she did shopping in Guildford. The village of Limpley was little more than a hamlet. One man, Quentin Woodward, became a welcome visitor at *Meadowsweet*, the parson, not *persona grata* to Aunt Frances, because he wore no dog-collar. He prepared Eve for Confirmation. Mrs. Crampton spoke of the untimely death of his predecessor, an octogenarian, as a bereavement. With the young people in the straggling parish, Woodward was popular. To Sybil, he was a dual personality, priest and man, but out of his church more man than priest, as interested in bodies as he was in minds and souls. Boy scouts and girl guides adored him. Miss Miriam (so Eve told her mother) had a "crush" on him, because he maintained that mind could triumph over muscle on a tennis-court. He was a Cambridge runner "Blue". His lean, well-proportioned body supported an attractive ugly head with irregular features. Nose and chin were too big for a sensitive mouth, almost the mouth of a woman; his eyes, a cornflower blue, twinkled beneath shaggy brows; his dark hair defied comb and brush. Serving as a padre in France, he had been severely wounded in 1917. Mrs. Crampton was shocked when the Vicar turned the drawing-room at the Vicarage into a canteen——! That was his unseemly word for it. The residents on the Hog's Back spoke of it as the Club-house.

Quentin became a dominating influence in *Meadowsweet*, partly because he was an infrequent visitor. Friendship between Sybil and him established itself at sight, a case of like to like. He divined the presence of a nigger in the woodpile. Mrs. Golightly never spoke of her absent husband; her little daughter never mentioned him in her mother's presence, but, alone with Quentin, love for Sunny Jim radiated out of her. As priest, Quentin disdained the curiosities of the normal man. If—as idle gossip affirmed—some scandal had been hushed up, it was impossible to think ill of Sybil. And it was richly to her credit that she had not inflicted her woes on her daughter. Suddenly, full enlightenment came to him. He had called on his parishioner to bespeak help in some small matter. Importunate beggar he might be, but he made no demands on depleted purses. Sybil was eager to give time instead of cash. He was taking leave of her, when she thanked him for his kindness and interest in Eve.

"She calls you Uncle——"

"We're pals," he replied.

"She wants to join the Club——"

"Why not?"

The Christmas holidays had begun. During the long evenings time hung heavily on Eve's hands; she was no Alice-sit-by-the-fire; she had become "maty" with the *Highmount* boarders; she missed their companionship. Sybil refused to allow her to gad about alone after dark.

Sybil made a gesture. Quentin interpreted it as a repudiation of class distinctions, but he was not too sure that Miss Poin-dexter would approve contacts with all and sundry. He said hastily:

"No objections from you?"

"None."

"Good! I'm out, as you know, for unity, collective security; the herd instinct is strong in me. If people can sit side by side in church, why can't they do so in my canteen?"

"If Eve joins up, so must I. Do the village mothers come with their girls?"

"One or two. It would be a sacrifice on your part, eh?"

"No; I'm happy when I see Eve happy."

"That's the spirit. It's a physical tonic to look on at a fair even if we keep off the roundabouts. You could help with the refreshments. I believe I'm keener to get you than Eve. I covet more mothers. If you joined up, I might coax Miss Miriam to keep you company. Good sort she is; a mixer."

"Thanks——"

"Thanks——?"

"You guessed so quickly that I was thinking of Mrs. Grundy. The war didn't kill her."

He laughed.

"Not dead nor sleeping in Surrey. If I owned a red-drugget, I'd spread it for you and Eve."

"I hope that she doesn't chatter to you too much about herself?"

"About herself? I believe I've a clearer vision of her father than I have of her."

He spoke, of course, without thinking. Unconsidered speech shatters many barriers. To his relief, his hostess smiled.

"He's 'wonderful' to her. Perhaps wonderful to you, if you can see through her eyes. I—I feel I must—I *must* speak of him to you, because I know you are clever and honest. I hope I am as honest as a woman can be when she is face to face with—with expediency. It is expedient, isn't it, to—to n-nurse illusions even if we know them to be delusions?"

He inclined his head, meeting her eyes, clear as a child's.

Her hesitating diction impressed him. He was sure she could answer her question without help from him, a question intimately personal. His war experience, the suffering he had endured in a field hospital, had shaken the foundations of his faith in a merciful God. In the end, his "nursing" of illusions, his patience and fortitude, and the patience and fortitude of others, had restored his faith, made it stronger. He said, after a long pause:

"I am honoured. Anything you may care to say to me I shall regard as a confidence."

"It is a confidence I have withheld from my own people, Mr. Woodward. How often in the past months I have wished that I was a Roman Catholic. I wanted the advice of a man wiser than myself. You know my sister Frances. She has been so kind, so generous, but I couldn't talk to her about my husband because her husband was so different from mine. May I begin at the beginning?"

"Please."

"I was eighteen when I married, in 1910. It was a love match, but I married a man socially my superior against my father's wishes although I was married from his house. He refused to make me an allowance, but when he died, fifteen thousand pounds were settled on me and Eve. These details are tiresome, but it proves that my husband didn't marry me for my money. He had money of his own. I should like to show you a photograph of him taken just before he left Eton."

She rose, went to the davenport, and returned with a photograph handsomely framed. Quentin's eyes brightened as he stared at it. It was a speaking likeness of a jolly ardent boy. He appeared to be saying what was written in ink across the left corner: "In Pop." Woodward had been a scholar of Winchester; election to Pop explained the smile on the boy's lips. He retained the photograph, as Sybil went on:

"I must tell you why my father opposed the marriage. Jim's father had been disowned by his father. But he died before I met Jim, penniless. Fortunately for Jim, his mother had money. I am sure she rubbed it into him that he must make money. Anyway, Jim became a clerk in a stockbroker's office. When he married me, he was a junior partner. For two or three years I was as happy as any girl could hope to be. That is why Eve looks and is so happy. I think it's true that the children of love take after the father. In that photograph do you see any likeness to Eve?"

"It might be a portrait of Eve in boy's clothes."

"That's why I showed it to you. *Then the war broke out . . .*"

Up to this point she had spoken so quietly that Quentin had been interested rather than enthralled. He was startled at the change in her soft voice when she mentioned the war. It became hard, menacingly so. She sat erect in her chair, gripping the arms of it.

"Your husband fought in the war?" he asked.

"I—I wish he had. I blame myself that he didn't. I was like that woman in Millais' picture, *The Huguenots*. Jim's father had been a guardsman; Jim wanted to enlist as a Tommy in the Grenadiers. I—I begged him on my knees not to leave me. What did I care about his honour? I was terrified of losing him. Well," she spoke almost savagely, "I deserved to lose him." Swiftly she regained self-control, as she continued: "The boy in that photograph is—fearless?"

"Yes."

"But the chin is—weak?"

"Not noticeably."

"He gave way, Mr. Woodward. His partners urged him not to desert *them*. And then, in 1915, as he was leaving his office, some woman handed him a white feather. What did he do? What would you have done?" Quentin held his tongue, amazed to see that she was smiling. "The senior partner was with him; and he told me what Jim did. He took the feather, put it into his buttonhole, lifted his hat and said: 'Thank you. I shall be in khaki as soon as may be.' But again," her voice hardened, "I was too much for him. I persuaded him to join the Cadets Training Corps. I pulled what strings I could; and his partners helped me. Jim was gazetted to a regiment in Mesopotamia. He was in India when the war ended."

To Quentin a not unexciting narrative had achieved anticlimax. Sybil was lying back in her chair, relaxed. Was she awaiting censure from a man who had been under fire, or sympathy from a compassionate priest? He murmured:

"If you feel up to it, please go on. In your place, I should have done what you did."

She looked at him bleakly:

"What I did, hoping to keep him, led ultimately to losing him."

There was another long pause.

## CHAPTER THREE

## I

MRS. GOLIGHTLY, SO WOODWARD REFLECTED, MIGHT BE REGRETTING her loss of self-control, her lapse (as she might regard it) from manners possibly acquired after marriage. He recalled a line from *Locksley Hall*: "As the husband is, the wife is." Eve had told him that her father had delightful manners, so different, she had added ingenuously, from what she had read in a manual entitled *Social Etiquette*. An Old Wykehamist had chuckled, recalling the sacrosanct *Notions* of his college, where from time immemorial boys had spoken of themselves as MEN. Respecting Mrs. Golightly's silence, he glanced again at the photograph still in his hand. If it were true that the boy is father to the man, what sort of fellow was James Golightly? Assuredly not a coward, but quite probably a weakling, too anxious to please. He admired open candid eyes, and lips with kindly, gracious curves. Eve had inherited her father's eyes and lips, and his delicately rounded chin . . .

"I apologise, Mr. Woodward."

He laid the photograph on a table beside him.

"No, no," he replied hastily, "the war upset and changed all of us."

"Will you light a cigarette or a pipe? I've made a sorry beginning, but I am myself again."

He lit his pipe. She went on, less hesitatingly:

"My husband came back. . . . Eve was then nearly ten years old. Whilst Jim was in India I lived too much alone. I saw nothing at all of our smart friends, who were his friends. My own people stood by. I had saved a little money. I must tell you that Jim never talked business to me. *He . . . he hadn't saved money.* . . . But he was keen to make money, and he said, 'If stupid people can make money, any man with good wits can do it.' I knew that he must have good wits, because his partners tried so hard to keep him in the office. Other people wanted him. . . . When he spoke of stupid people making money, I am afraid he was thinking of his partners. Had he stayed with them, he would have made money. How difficult it is to go on, and you are listening so patiently. . . ."

"And sympathetically. Your story is convincing."

"You hearten me. Jim looked wonderfully well. I suppose

if we want anything hard enough, we get it. Jim got working capital by selling out of his firm. Then he went into partnership with a man I never met, a clever Jew. After the war there was a boom. Jim made money for a year or two . . . I—I stopped pinching. It wasn't a happy time for either of us."

"You mean," he suggested, "that he wanted more and more?"

"How quick you are! Yes. He loathed Gloucester Road. His heart was set on a country place. I became a wee bit jealous because he talked to Eve about it, not to me. She repeated what he said. I knew, but Jim didn't, that we were drifting apart——"

Quentin's pipe went out; he laid it on the table beside the photograph, enthralled not by the story but by the storyteller. Many women had confided in him. Very few spoke with self-detachment. Here was a notable exception. He was certain that Sybil still loved her husband. She had proffered no apology for anything he had done; she had indicted herself. He had ceased to be a priest; he was aware of her ever-increasing womanly attraction. What a wife for the right man!

"He must have known it," he growled.

"You can't see him clearly. How could you? You and he are—are poles apart."

Was this a subtle compliment or not?

"Are we?" He frowned. "Ever since I took Orders, in and out of the pulpit I have preached what I take to be the essence of Christianity——"

"The essence?"

"The reconciliation of God with man, the faith that God is in man, that God alone redeems man and makes man like Himself. I refuse to believe that any man, even a savage, is poles apart from me."

"Reconciliation is a lovely word. You are helping me more than you know."

"Milton could detect the essence mixed with bestial slime. And I recall lines which I used as a text, written by an American more than a hundred years ago. 'He who believes in goodness has the essence of all faith; he is the man of cheerful yesterdays and confident tomorrows.'"

"Then Jim was good. I mean—I mean——"

She gazed helplessly at her parson.

"I know what you mean; you were misled by two false guides: appearances and office. I was an ugly boy; and I am your Vicar. You were saying that your husband and you were drifting apart. . . ."

"I blame the war which separated us. I blame myself because I lived in a fools' paradise. If his dreams had come true, I should be in it today. He was gay to the last. What happened I don't know. I do know what happened to Jim's father. He—he," she lowered her voice, "had to leave his clubs because he couldn't meet debts of honour. He went to Florence, where he died. His father, a rich old man, refused to pay his son's debts and disowned him. But his wife's people sent Jim to Eton. And he went, almost straight from Eton, into an office. Jim—and I admire him for it—had nothing to do with his swell family. He held on to one good friend, Sir Edward Popham. He came to me. Jim asked him to come. He told me that Jim was on his way to the Argentine, already at sea. His partner had disappeared. Sir Edward said that friends would see to it that Jim had a fresh start. I was stunned. It was so obvious that a kind man was hoping I would not ask questions. I—I took it all in a sort of trance. Next day, my brother came to me. I had seen very little of him after my marriage; he is my trustee. He said that my money was safe, that Jim was safe. He added grimly: 'He'll be whitewashed all right.' I was furious. I told him that Jim was straight. He replied, 'His partner wasn't! What, I ask you, could I think?'"

"Nobody could throw a pebble at you if you thought the worst, but I'm sure you didn't."

"I had to think of Eve. I had to lie and go on lying to her. She was heartbroken because her father hadn't kissed her good-bye. That's all, Mr. Woodward; I've told you everything. My own people have asked no questions."

"I shall ask none. You had thought for your child. Your lies were white lies."

"Jim has written twice to Eve. I'll show you his letters."

She did so. Quentin read them. Then he nerved himself to ask one question:

"If you have a photograph of Mr. Golightly taken recently, I should like to look at it?"

"There's one in Eve's bedroom; I'll fetch it."

Quentin opened the door for her. He stood still, unable to analyse his emotions. Full well he knew the appeal of weakness to strength; but this slender, slightly frail woman was strong. Not a doubt of it! Strong and silent. Suppressed speech had burst out of her. She would disdain pity. He stroked his chin. He glanced at the furnishings, comparing the "chintzy" parlour with the rococo splendours of Mrs. Crampton's drawing-room.

Would Mrs. Golightly affirm that she was poles apart from her own sister?

Sybil came back.

"This," she said, "was taken three years ago."

He took the photograph from her.

"Do you see the boy in that?"

He did. Jim looked astoundingly young, well on the right of forty. He wore golfing kit and carried a niblick. Why a niblick? Had this any significance? Quentin played golf. He reckoned a niblick to be a golfer's best friend. . . .

"This was taken when your husband was making money?"

"Yes. But he looked like that all the time. He told me when he won; he refused to talk about his losses."

"I must leave you. I have an appointment at four. Before I go, I'll say this: the letters your husband wrote to his daughter were written for you. He could say to her what he couldn't say to you. He will come back if——"

"If he can bring sheaves with him."

"With or without them if God spares his life."

2

A passage-of-arms between the sisters must be recorded soon after Sybil and Eve paid their first visit to the canteen. Mrs. Crampton protested in no uncertain terms:

"Why," she asked, "do you cheapen yourself?"

"Dear Frances, it was you who urged me to be more neighbourly."

"Tch! Why didn't you consult me?"

"Because perhaps I'm as set in my ways as you are in yours."

"Yours is the pride that apes humility. I'm upset. I do my duty in Limpley. I attend Mothers' Meetings and so forth. I can guess what has happened. Mr. Woodward got at you. If he were a married man, which he ought to be, the drawing-room at the Vicarage would not be a bear-garden."

"You might call it a kindergarten."

"It is, and some of the children are not too clean. If I went there, I should dust my old head with Keating's powder."

"Eve thoroughly enjoyed herself."

"Romping with a pack of guttersnipes——!"

"Yes, in rompers."



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"Yes, in rompers."

"Really, Sybil, this is too much. Perhaps you wore . . . slacks?"

"I wore what I've got on, Frances. How up-to-date you are. Slacks is a new word. I prefer it to 'pants'."

"Perhaps you will be good enough to tell me why a Young People's Club is a kindergarten?"

"Because, in a queer way, Mr. Woodward is as old-fashioned as we are."

"Old-fashioned! And you've just told me I am up-to-date. I march with the times."

"But you know that children are chaperons. Mr. Woodward knows that. He likes his joke. He said that Eve would chaperon me. I noticed at once that the young men and the girls behaved themselves because Eve was there, the youngest of all of them."

Aunt Frances was shrewd as well as sensible. She looked at her sister keenly, aware of a change in her. What had lent sparkle to her eyes?

"Something in that, I dare say," she admitted. "But mixed grills disagree with my palate. Is our vicar attempting to turn Limpley into Upsidonia?"

"Mr. Woodward is a gentleman and a Christian."

"He's a *Radical*."

She pursed up her austere lips.

"Is he? He has never talked politics to me. He has done what your old friend, Prebendary Leigh, failed to do. He has filled a lot of empty pews; he is interested in all his people; class distinctions are hateful to him."

This indiscreet remark provoked wrath. The late Prebendary Leigh had honoured class distinctions. Being a very old man, he had abandoned long before his death house visitations. His "Old Dears", as he termed the elderly matrons, preferred, so he affirmed, packets of tea, an occasional bottle of port, or even gin, to his company. He had independent means. Till his wife predeceased him, he had entertained the gentry charmingly. Mrs. Crampton was of opinion that a Veal was speaking ill of the dead.

"You upset me, Sybil. Have you lent an ear to this pernicious nonsense about equality? Do you believe that a mere person, possibly illiterate, is the equal of a . . . a PERSONAGE? Do you think *your* charwoman *your* equal?"

The Veals, as a family, lacked humour. Jim's humour had been irrepressible. He achieved a "twist" when dealing with *cliché*. Often, during her married life, Sybil had hoped that some day she might be inspired to say the right thing at the right

moment instead of thinking of it many hours afterwards. To Mrs. Crampton's dismay (and annoyance) she laughed.

"Fanny! What a stab in the back! My charlady is quite sure she is my superior. And . . . and she is."

"What——!"

"She can do her job, which is also my job, far more efficiently than I can, and in about half the time. I talk with her. She has brought up five children. . . . As a mother, she soars above me. . . . She is a better Christian than I am with—with, yes, a firmer faith in a merciful Providence."

Aunt Frances listened agape, unable to get her teeth, or, let us say, her dentures, into this presentment of what appeared on the surface to be FACTS. What, she asked herself, had mis-created this inferiority complex? At a loss for words, she contented herself for the moment with one comment:

"You are stabbing me in the back."

"No, no . . . revaluations have not been forced on you, but they have on me. If your husband had left you, you would have wondered what was wrong with yourself."

"He left you—it is my duty to be frank—because he had found out his own unworthiness. Did Mr. Woodward suggest to you . . . revaluations?"

"He preached a sermon about them. Let's have this out. You took so much trouble to find me two good servants. I'm everlastingly grateful. You have made things so wonderfully easy for me. It is difficult, almost impossible, for you to stand in my shoes. I try to be honest with myself. I feel a worm when I talk with Mrs. Tagg. . . ."

"Who, pray, is Mrs. Tagg?"

"My cook."

"Of course. I had forgotten the good woman's name. I recall her as Mrs. Stebbins, or plain Jane; she was very plain when she was my kitchen-maid. She married Tagg only five years ago; I don't altogether approve of second marriages; and I don't approve of familiar chats with servants. Please don't tell me you think Jane Tagg your superior?"

"But she is. Do you remember a comedy by Barrie, *The Admirable Crichton*? You do. Well, on a desert island, the butler became the chief; his master, the noble lord, took orders from him."

"I disliked the comedy."

"Perhaps I did . . . I can't remember. But today, if we were on a desert island, I should have to kow-tow to Mrs. Tagg."

"You are not on a desert island. However——"

"Yes?"

"I must let you simmer awhile in your own juices. If you become too familiar with the lower orders they will have contempt for YOU. Now we'll talk about Eve. I am very pleased with HER. I share with you an undivided interest in the child. Her wish to please is so gratifying. I am apprehensive that she may bloom into a BEAUTY. So far as I know we have never had a beauty in the family. You were passably pretty. You are still. Mere prettiness is more common than it was. Too much of it comes out of a box. Outstanding beauty is rare, happily so."

"Why?"

"I recall a very ugly adjective which attached itself to Beauty in the 'nineties. PROFESSIONAL——"

"Fanny!"

"Tch; our dear mother spoke of the famous Mrs. Langtry as a professional beauty. The daughter of a Dean became an actress." Mrs. Crampton sighed. When she mentioned her mother, she looked so quaintly like her. Mrs. Veal had not marched with her times. She remained to the last a Victorian. Mrs. Crampton continued: "We are confronted, you and I, with rather an exciting possibility if Eve becomes a beauty. Her portrait might appear in *The Tatler*. She would achieve what we both dislike—publicity. If that happened, it would come to the notice of her father's family. She might be 'taken up', odious expression, by a great lady reputed to be the most exclusive châtelaine in the kingdom."

Eve's mother sat silent. This possibility had not occurred to her. Very dimly, as her lids fluttered over her eyes, she could see marble halls and her little daughter in them, delightfully at home. She smiled faintly.

"Eve will grow into a happy healthy woman. I cross no bridges till I come to them. There was a Beauty in the Golightly family who came to sad grief. You spoke of my juices. They are sweeter, dear."

The passage-of-arms came to its end. Mrs. Crampton said superbly:

"Sugar, as Jane Tagg will tell you, is the great preservative."

3

Again the weeks sped by. Eve's report at Easter was better than the report at Christmas. Under the heading *Games*, Miss

Miriam put her signature to lines which Eve showed triumphantly to Quentin Woodward:

*Golightly, I am glad to say, is showing increasing aptitudes. She keeps her temper; she is a good loser; she is learning to play for her side.*

What Miss Poindexter wrote under *Conduct* was not shown to the Vicar.

*Golightly has done well this term, but she lacks concentration. I have told her that she is a skipper. She skips too quickly over difficulties and away from them. She is too happy-go-lucky.*

When her mother took Eve to task, she skipped away from admonition, saying lightly:

"I've a new name for the Prof. It may catch on. I call her 'P.S.', short for postscript. Not too bad for me, Mum. When she puts us on the mat, her last words, just as we're leaving the room, give the last bang to the nail."

"That's as it should be. You can take your report to Aunt Frances."

"How I wish darling Daddy could see it!"

No tidings had come from Paraguay.

"I shall keep it to show to him; I shall show it to Sir Edward. You know that I want to be proud of you?"

"Yes; and I want Daddy to be proud of me. I want to grow up to be just like him."

4

Aunt Frances was augustly pleased with the report.

"This," she said, "entitles you to a prize. Have you been awarded a prize?"

"No."

"Would you like to spend a week with your mother at Bournemouth?"

"Aunt Frances! I should love it. How perfectly sweet of you! You mean next summer?"

"I mean next week. In summer, so I'm told, the Bournemouth sands are black with trippers, made black, no doubt, by them. The tides cleanse them. Sea air will do you good. The Imperial Hotel has been commended to me."

"How kind and generous you are!"

It would be unkind and untrue to indict Mrs. Crampton as one who set an inordinate value on money. She knew the power of money; none better. She tipped her servants handsomely; she was, as has been recorded, over-staffed. A tip, a trifle more than might be expected, was to her a *praemium diligentiae*. Her servants stayed with her. She went on:

"You will be close to the New Forest, unspoiled England. You will visit, as I did long ago, Corfe Castle, Lulworth Castle, Swanage, Weymouth and Portland . . ."

"Hardy's country."

"Bless me! You haven't read Thomas Hardy's novels?"

"Not yet. Mim, Miss Miriam, thinks him a crackerjack—I—I mean, one of our greatest novelists. She has talked to me about Hardy's country. Maybe we could visit the Swannery at Abbotsford. It all sounds too heavenly. You are a darling."

On the Thursday following Easter Monday, Sybil and Eve adventured to Bournemouth. Eve, to her delight, dined with her mother at eight. Some of our sages decline to believe in coincidence. Be that as it may, the unexpected colours and discolours our lives. The head waiter in the dining-room showed mother and daughter to their seats at a small table. He seemed to Eve to be paying them particular attention. Why? As he handed the menu to Mrs. Golightly, he whispered: "General Golightly is here, alone at the table near the door." Then he withdrew. Sybil saw an elderly man, strikingly handsome, who was giving attention to the wine list. The wine waiter stood at attention near him.

"Have you ever heard, Mum," asked Eve, "of General Golightly?"

"Yes."

"Is he any relation of Daddy's?"

"I—I think your Daddy's father and he were brothers."

"Then, he's my great-uncle."

"Your father's grandfather had half a dozen sons. I hope this won't spoil our dinner."

"Why should it? He looks a tremendous swell. I wondered why the head waiter bowed before he took us to our table."

"Stop staring at him. Golightly is not a very uncommon name. The General distinguished himself in the war. It is quite likely he has never heard of us. You know that your grandfather was cruelly treated by the General's father."

"I do. But you never told me why?"

"I'll tell you all about it when you're older. If . . . if the General takes no notice of us, I shall try to forget that he is a guest in this hotel."

"All right. But somehow I feel bucked that I am his great-niece."

"But I'm not certain that you are."

If she fibbed, let us forgive her. She noticed that the General drank a pint of champagne with his dinner. After dinner she glanced at the hotel register. Many cadets of the family had been soldiers. The General had signed his name in full, Charles Somerset Golightly. He was, incontestably, Jim's uncle. Sybil put Eve to bed and read a novel when the girl fell asleep. . . .

Two days passed. On the third day, Sybil was sitting alone in the lounge, after luncheon, when the General sauntered up.

"You are Mrs. Golightly," he said pleasantly. She inclined her head. "I am General Golightly. I have more kinsmen than I can count on my fingers and toes. Is your charming little daughter my kinswoman?"

"She is your great-niece. My husband, Jim, is in Paraguay."

"May I sit down for a moment?"

He had Jim's voice and manners. Sybil regained her composure. At any moment, Eve, who was changing her frock, might join them. The worst was over. He went on:

"I never met your husband. There was a rumpus years ago. My brother died in Florence. He was in the Grenadiers; I was in the Cavalry, in the Punjab. At one time he was reckoned to be the most popular man in the Brigade. What is my nephew doing in Paraguay? I have nephews scattered all over the globe—rolling stones, seeking moss."

He paused as Eve appeared. Although she was a schoolgirl, he stood up, holding out his hand, smiling.

"I don't know your name yet, but I'm your uncle. Uncle Charlie."

"My name is Eve."

"And yours?" he turned to her mother.

"Sybil."

"I congratulate myself. I have found two nieces."

He sat down. Eve remained standing. Her cheeks were aglow; her eyes were a-sparkle.

"Am I to call you Uncle Charlie?"

"Certainly, both of you. I have been called Champagne Charlie. Fortunately, I was in the ark with Noah. If I hadn't



been, I should have been drowned. Now, look here, you two. I'm leaving tomorrow. Tonight you must dine with me. It's not an invitation, but a command."

"We shall love it," said Eve.

"And you, Sybil?"

"You are very kind."

"We can meet here just before eight. *A toute à l'heure.*"

He rose and walked briskly out of the room.

## 5

Eve sat beside her mother, took her hand and squeezed it.

"I shall love Uncle Charlie," she whispered.

"Darling, we know nothing about him."

"Of course he's a wonderful old bachelor. If he were married, his wife would be with him, wouldn't she?"

"Not necessarily. You know—I—rather wish he hadn't been quite so complimentary."

"You have no idea how sweet you look. If he gives us cham at dinner, may I have a glass? Daddy always gave me a sip out of his glass and I jolly well took a swig."

"You can have one glass. I'm glad you changed your frock. Don't talk too much at dinner. Remember, we may never see this new uncle again."

"He's so different from my other uncles."

She had two, her mother's brothers, both men of business, both Veals.

"He is. We must hurry a little, or we shall be late for the concert at the Pavilion."

The City Fathers of Bournemouth pride themselves on the music they provide for their fellow-townsmen, not unmindful of their visitors. Sybil was sensitive to harmony, but she sat in her chair hearing little except the Golightly voice. Was it an heirloom in the family? She felt that Jim had come back; he was sitting beside her, talking with his invincible optimism. Was she glad or sorry that the General was leaving Bournemouth on the morrow? Obviously, he knew nothing about Jim. What he might know about his brother he had probably brushed aside. There were skeletons in all noble closets. She recalled what Jim had said about his father: "The old lad had to vanish. In Florence, he ruffled it." She could see Jim ruffling it in Buenos Aires."

After tea in the hotel, Eve and she walked on the pier, where

a dozen anglers were angling in vain. One enthusiast watched half a dozen rods to which bells were attached. Eve talked to him. Not a bell tinkled.

"Bad luck," she said.

"No, Missie. Luck turns. A fortnight ago I caught a whopper. I've nothin' better to do, see? I've retired from business. It retired from me. I sit here, smoke me pipe and think of . . . of 'appier days."

As they walked back to the hotel, Eve wondered why her mother was so silent.

"Have you a headache?" she asked.

"No." After a pause she said impulsively: "I am saddened. The General's voice is so like your father's."

"Isn't it? But that made me happy. Uncle Charlie is such a dear. Are you sad because he's going away tomorrow?"

"Rather the contrary. You are old enough to understand what I'm feeling, but it mustn't spoil our dinner tonight. You see, Eve, we are not playing quite fair. The General is not alone at the hotel——"

"Heavens! He has a wife with him?"

"Pull yourself together. He has a manservant. What does that tell you?"

"Nothing."

"I'm glad it doesn't; but it means that, socially speaking, he is in a different class—he would call it order—to us. Let me finish. We are staying at a swell hotel, thanks to Aunt Frances' generosity. We are," she glanced at Eve's pretty frock, "all dressed up. Our new uncle is a man of leisure and—and pleasure. Would he be so friendly if he knew that we lived in a small cottage on a small income?"

"Mum, I say he would."

"Well, I believe he would. But," she paused, wondering if she had said enough. To her surprise, Eve pressed the arm to which she was clinging and spoke quietly:

"I know what you're thinking. If Uncle Charlie asked us to stay with him, and wanted to jolly things up for us, we—we should have to—to back down."

"Bless you! You have your moments. Once upon a time, a young married couple were living free of debt in a cottage. A rich uncle gave them some brocaded curtains. The curtains barked at everything else in their parlour. So, being young and foolish, they went into debt to refurnish the parlour. Then the parlour barked at other rooms in the house. So they refurnished

them. And that did 'em in, poor darlings. They marched bang out of their home into the Bankruptcy Court."

"I catch on, Mum. We have to mind our step."

"We must go slow. At dinner tonight I shall try to make it plain to Uncle Charlie that we don't trot in his class. If, after that, he looks us up, we shall know where we are."

"One of the girls at *Highmount* told me that poor relations were a nuisance. Anyway, Aunt Frances doesn't think us a nuisance."

They had reached the hotel. Sybil found in her room a bunch of roses and a box of chocolates for Eve.

## 6

The dinner was not the *table d'hôte* dinner. Uncle Charlie had ordered oysters, salmon, poussins and an ice. Eve tucked in. The General said little about himself; he took avuncular interest in his brace of nieces, which made things easy for Sybil.

"Any chance," he asked, "of seeing you at Ascot?"

Eve had never heard of Ascot. Sybil had been there in the pre-war days, when Jim and she lived in Mayfair.

"If you were keen about it," he said to Sybil, "I could get you a ticket for the Enclosure. We could lunch together in the Cavalry Tent."

This was the moment for enlightenment. With the sincerity which captivated Quentin Woodward, she replied:

"I can't afford any junketings. Probably Eve and I are your poorest relations. We live in a small cottage near Guildford. Eve is a day-boarder at a good school. My sister pays the fees."

The General appeared to be slightly taken aback. He was wearing a dinner-jacket; he may have noticed that his guests had not changed their frocks. He laughed.

"You are rich with little store, eh? I forget who said that. I've never envied my nephew, the present Head of the Family. He's poor with too great store. Is Eve at *Highmount*?"

"How ever did you guess that?" Eve exclaimed.

"Because somebody told me it was the best girls' school near Guildford and, unless my memory fails me, Dolly Tremayne sent her girl there. Old Lady Augusta Tremayne was my aunt."

Eve said excitedly:

"Then Tremayne is a cousin of mine. I didn't know that; nor does she."

"I didn't know it," her mother added.

Uncle Charlie saved an awkward situation.

"Why should you? Good lord! I've never set eyes on Dolly's daughter. What sort of filly is she?"

"She's older than I am and a boarder; so she doesn't take much notice of me. I shall tell her I've met you."

Poor Sybil . . . !

Nervously she crumbled the crisp croissant beside her plate; she felt enmeshed. But this was another opportunity to enlighten a host too well-bred to be curious.

"I'd rather you didn't tell her. The General will agree with me——"

"Not if you call me—General."

"I so hate gate-crashers. I knew that you were Lord Flam-borough's uncle. I—I simply couldn't have spoken to you till you spoke to me. And surely the same applies to Eve and this distant cousin."

"She isn't distant, Mum."

Sybil ignored this; her eyes were on the General's. Gallantly he came to her rescue.

"Your mother is right," he said cheerfully. "And I'll permit myself one remark. If the filly takes after her dam, I'm not too keen to make her acquaintance."

"She might snub me, Uncle Charlie. Yes; as our Mrs. Tagg says, 'I'll keep meself to meself.'"

She mimicked the charlady, and had to tell her new uncle more about her.

"I look forward to meeting Mrs. Tagg."

Coffee was served in the lounge. Presently Eve, most reluctantly, went to bed. The General lingered on, smoking a Corona de Corona. He said some pleasant things about Eve.

"Upstanding, outstanding and understanding. Coming on nicely. I'd be proud to have a daughter as—as *promising* as she is. You mentioned your sister. Does she live near you?"

"Within half a mile—Mrs. Crampton. Our maiden name was Veal. I'm proud of my family, Uncle Charlie, but we're middle-class folk."

"You and your girl could hold your own anywhere."

"Our own? We own so little." She smiled. "And we hang on to it."

"Brava! Old bachelors like old saws. 'Little boats should keep near the shore.' You look a happy woman; you love your little cottage. I should like to see it, but I'm an old has-been, the slave of my engagement book."

He talked on genially. Something he happened to say about India greatly interested Sybil.

"I had a great time in the Punjab after I joined my regiment. I spent a long leave in Kashmir. A fellow who likes fishin' and shootin' and wants to do himself well can live in luxury by Bendemeer's stream on less than six hundred a year. Still, I don't mind telling you, it spoiled me a bit. Things were made too easy. Half a dozen servants cost less than I pay my man whom I have here."

"I hope he has enjoyed his holiday."

"He has had a holiday; little to do except clean my pipes. But somehow I can't do without him."

When Sybil took leave of him, he patted her slim shoulder.

"I shan't forget my nieces. Your Jim was at Eton. I was at Harrow. Wouldn't he want his daughter to see the Match at Lord's? I'm a member of the M.C.C. I could send you tickets."

She was tempted to reply, "Please do." Well did she remember the "circle vast", and Jim's delight when Harrow "toppers" were "bashed in".

"Thank you," she murmured, "I will write for tickets if Jim comes back."

Eve was fast asleep when she went upstairs. Sybil undressed leisurely. As she brushed her hair, her thoughts wandered afield to India. Had the easy life there spoiled Jim?

## CHAPTER FOUR

### I

SIR EDWARD POPHAM CAME AGAIN TO MEADOWSWEET. ON this second visit he brought no news; and he had to make most painfully clear that this time no news was bad news. He came in the afternoon, before Eve returned from school.

"I've had a letter," he began, "from my agents in Buenos Aires. I wrote to them a few weeks ago. I asked them to find out, if they could, how Jim's expedition had fared. I will read you their reply: the part of it that matters.

*"In Montevideo and elsewhere we have made enquiries. It seems that Mr. James Golightly expected to be away for some months. He reached safely the outside edge of civilisation and then pushed on. Nobody can even guess where he is. He must have exhausted the*

*supplies he took with him. He was heading for the northern section where there is gold and other minerals. He may have crossed the frontier into Brazil. . . .*

"Paraguay," said Sir Edward, "has a good climate; and its resources are still undeveloped."

"You want to cheer me up. I—I have felt from the first that Jim would not come back."

"I have hope that he will. Think of Livingstone. He was lost in the heart of Africa for how long? I don't remember. So long that Stanley was sent to find him, which he did."

She remained silent. He was unable to guess her thoughts, intensely sorry for her. Passing from the gate to the front door he had noticed that the small garden was in order, carefully tended. He had noticed, too, that she looked stronger. He put the letter into his pocket.

"Is that all?" she asked.

He lied.

"Yes."

He had not read a postscript:

*It is believed in Montevideo that Mr. Golightly is dead.*

Sir Edward shared that belief.

He also believed that his friend's wife was as serene as she appeared to be. He had apprehended and dreaded a pitiful breakdown. Seldom indeed can a man understand a woman possessed of self-control, although, unless he is a fool, he knows that Englishwomen are trained from childhood to suppress their feelings. How many men can smile when they have a headache? Lady Popham, with or without provocation, could weep like Niobe and rave like a Maenad. But she had Latin blood in her veins. Not too skilfully he attempted to wean Sybil's mind from Jim to his child. To this Sybil responded so swiftly that he made sure Eve was dearer to her than Jim. The good fellow stayed on till Eve appeared. She beamed at him when he said:

"How's my god-daughter?"

"You have news of Daddy; I know you have!"

He pinched her cheek, experiencing an odd thrill. A child was almost a woman, and her likeness to her father rejuvenated him. For a moment he was back in the Eton playing-fields, listening to Jim's laughing voice. He had told one lie; now he must tell another.

"No news," he replied, "which, as I told your mother the last time I was here, is good news."

Sybil was quick to realise why he said nothing about the letter, and as quick to suspect that he might have lied to her. Eve went on gaily:

"He has found the apples——"

"The apples?"

"That's a family joke. It was never a stale joke to me. You think he's found a gold-mine, don't you?"

"I twig. But the object of this expedition was not gold; it was, as you put it, apples. The biggest pippin would be land, splendid grazing or arable land which would justify building roads and perhaps railroads, to open it up."

"Sir Edward——! Have you built railways?"

"M'm . . . I've helped to do so."

"Then it was you who sent Daddy to South America?"

"He——wanted to go . . . I encouraged him to go."

"Ah! You, his great friend, would never have sent him so far away unless you were sure that he would come back with the apples." She rattled on: "I believe I know Dad better than even Mum does. Maybe he swanked a little with me. Yes, he told me he'd a bug inside him which bit him when he had to sit still. I often feel that way. My hero is Columbus. If I were a man——and I wish I was—I wouldn't stick in a fusty old office. I'd be over the hills and far away. At our school the Head is rather down on that——"

"Is she? Why?"

"Only the other day she gave us a lecture on Wanderlust. She said we wanted an antidote. You see we'd all been thrilled by a bishop."

"Sounds rather unconvincing——"

"The father of one of our boarders, a Colonial bishop, but he looked pleased when he was called 'My Lord'. I was thrilled because his theme was *Undiscovered Country*. You can guess what he said about it?"

"I can't."

"Mum was there; she'll tell you."

"He thrilled me," Sybil said. "He'd worked among savages. He spoke figuratively, asking us to use our imaginations. He dealt with the undiscovered country in ourselves. It wasn't over the heads of the girls. He invited us to explore ourselves. He said that the heart of a young girl was Darkest Africa to herself."

"It is," Eve affirmed, with a giggle.

"It's possible," Sybil continued, "that the Head was dismayed."

"You bet she was, Sir Edward. I watched her face."

Sir Edward glanced at the two faces so near his own. As a chairman of many committees, he could express himself tersely. He detested irrelevancies. Semiconsciously he was contrasting this mother and daughter with his wife and girls, not to their advantage.

"I'm rattled," he admitted. "Why should the Head be dismayed?"

"Because," Sybil replied, "it's her job to—to discourage vagabond thoughts."

"Vagabond is good."

"She and her sister have been successful in making the girls concentrate on their work and play."

"They're both dears," Eve added, "but they have one-track minds."

"You—you found that out?"

"Eve is an echo," said Sybil. "And she exaggerates. I didn't hear Miss Poindexter's talk. Eve must tell you what she said."

"I'll have a shot at it. The Prof.—that's what we call her—is a prophet. Naturally she wants us to stay put. She says she distrusts wandering fancies. Inattention is a red rag to her. She didn't play skittles with the Bishop's lecture. She spoke of him as the 'dear' Bishop. Being a prophet, she sees ahead. She warned us solemnly against post-war temptations."

"Post-war temptations?"

"Yes; the wanderlust which makes a girl cut loose from her own home. Perhaps you feel as she does?"

"I wish I'd heard both talks," he murmured evasively.

"I do hope I haven't bored you to tears——"

"You haven't."

He stayed on to share their high tea. During the meal, Eve spoke of the new uncle, whom she hoped to meet again. Her mother said little. Sir Edward encouraged his god-daughter to talk as the spirit moved her, a Puck-like spirit with butterfly wings. It pleased him that she appeared to be unconscious of her sex. Mentally, she might have the wanderlust, but for the moment she was happy and contented at home. When he kissed her good-bye, he slipped a fiver into her hand, and sped away before she could thank him.



It was her first fiver. She had accompanied her godfather to the gate, where his resplendent car awaited him, leaving her mother in the parlour. She raced back, waving the note.

"Look! Look! He kissed me and gave me this—five pounds."

"When I was about your age, my godfather gave me five shillings—and his blessing, no kiss."

"You do say funny things . . . This makes me gloat. I shan't stuff it into my money-box. Damn the old money-box!"

"Darling——"

"Sorry . . . I've heard Mim say 'damn'. I'm so excited. I'm rich—rich. I must buy something tomorrow for you. Is there anything you want particularly—par-tic-u-larly?" She danced about the room. "I know—a new hat—a—a coquettish little cloche."

"You need a new hat."

"We'll go into Guildford and buy two hats. A girlie-girlie one for me off the peg, and a Paris model for you."

"Very well. After paying for the hats, you will have three pounds left for the money-box."

"No fear! I can buy my hat for fifteen bob. I shall bung four guineas into yours."

However, two hats were bought and three pounds found safe harbourage in the money-box. Aunt Frances approved of this.

"The child," she said, "is generous to a fault, not, not a Veal fault. I am very pleased with her. Her first thought was for you. Tell me more about her kind godfather."

The ladies were in the *Meadowsweet* parlour. Mrs. Crampton refused to buy a car for reasons which amused Sybil. If she had a car, so she pointed out, drawing down a long upper lip, she would have to engage a chauffeur. "And he would get my two younger maids into trouble, Sybil." Although she could well afford it, she also refused to "take the air" in a *barouche* drawn by two horses. Each day she drove into Guildford, or called on her friends, in a brougham with one aged horse between the shafts, and an aged retainer, the odd-job man, on the box. . . .

Aunt Frances knew that Sir Edward was a successful man of business; she deplored his addiction to "blood sports".

"He had no news, you say. I must ask a question. When James was in India, did you miss him?"

"Yes, I did."

"But now, dear, you are becoming resigned to his absence?"

"Am I?"

"Surely you know."

"I missed him dreadfully at first. I am happy in my cottage. Everybody has been so kind to me. If you hadn't sent me to Bournemouth I should never have met General Golightly."

Mrs. Crampton nodded. She had heard rather too much about Uncle Charlie from Eve. Her commonsense told her that Sir Edward, and General the Honourable Charles Golightly were Somebodies who might turn the head of a little Nobody, alone in a cottage for many hours each day, and living on a few hundreds a year. She nodded her head at mention of the General, saying acridly:

"I am informed that he is, or was, a gay bachelor, a—a *beau sabreur*."

"He's still gay, and still a beau. Is that against him?"

"N-n-no. Have you heard from him since he met his *nieces* at Bournemouth?"

Sybil laughed lightly.

"To Eve's disappointment, not mine, we haven't."

"Eve told me that he asked you to go to Ascot with him?"

"Not quite. He offered to get me a ticket for the Enclosure and have luncheon. That's all."

"Yes, yes, surface politeness."

"I don't think so. Frankly, to me he's a ship that passed in the night."

"You're a Veal. I shall be as frank as you are. I'm not too easy in my mind about OUR child. She is a blood relation of Lord Flamborough, and—and distressingly like her father's people. She has an air, a—a carriage, a distinction, which no Veal ever had."

"She is quite unaware of her looks."

"That may be a family trait."

"Why her looks distress you beats me."

"If—if this distinguished old gentleman did his duty by her, he—he——"

She broke off, aware that she could not cope with the duties of others. High society to her had fallen low soon after the death of the Great White Queen. She had read Dickens. She accepted as authentic his portraits of Lord Frederic Verisopht and Sir Mulberry Hawk. She had read Thackeray. She believed that the Marquess of Steyne was no worse than other puissant princes.

Modern novels had not enlightened her. When she read of "doings" and "undoings" in smart society, she thanked God that she belonged to the Middle Class. She had been heard to remark that Queen Mary and King George set an example which, most lamentably, was not copied by the nobility and landed gentry. . . .

Sybil could make allowances for her sister. She had found smart people rather dull and surprisingly respectable. Much amused, she finished Mrs. Crampton's sentence.

"He, you think, would spoil Eve?"

"I fear so. I read a novel when I was sixteen. What was it entitled? Is my memory failing me? It was called by the name of a bird, an extinct bird. It was written by the son of an archbishop, so it must have been true. I read it on the sly. What was the name of it?"

"*Dodo*."

"Did you read it, Sybil?"

"I did. I found it hidden away in your bedroom. It was, I think, a best seller. And *Dodo* was drawn, so Jim told me, from Mrs. Asquith."

"You're unhappily right."

"I wasn't shocked, Fanny. I thought it very amusing and clever."

"Flibbertigibbet, you were. What a picture of smart society in the naughty 'nineties! And conditions are worse today. Would you like our child to carry on as *Dodo* did?"

"If she married a Prime Minister, I shouldn't mind."

"Mercy! If Mr. Woodward were here, Rad. though he is, he'd be shocked as—as I am."

"It's such a hot day. Shall I make you a lemonade?"

"Tch!" She removed a mushroom hat and fanned herself with it. They were sitting on the small lawn, under a large red-and-white umbrella, in the heart of the garden of England. Aunt Frances could see sheep grazing in an adjoining meadow, no black ones in the flock. She could see the spire of the village church. Born and brought up in Kensington, she had grown to love the countryside. Rarely did she leave it. Replacing her hat, unaware that it had a slight list to port, she went on pontifically:

"We are here, Sybil, in this quiet little garden. I shall stay here till Eve comes dancing in. I feel very strongly that what is good enough for you and me is right for her. If, by any mischance, she were whirled away . . . What are you staring at? Is my old hat on straight?"

"It isn't. Let me put it straight. There, now you look yourself again."

"How did I look?"

"Rather funny."

"Perhaps I felt funny."

"You looked as if *you* had been whirled away."

"I was—I was. I had a sort of vision of Eve in Grosvenor Square."

"Grosvenor Square?"

"Lord Flamborough has a house there. I saw Eve in a ballroom, the—the belle of the ball, with half a dozen men about her. Ought I to take a couple of aspirins? Now and again I have bothering dreams. I am in my storeroom. I want to take down, say, a pot of jam. And my arms are paralysed. I can't move. Well, dear, I found myself, just now, in this ballroom, wearing my tweeds. Sometimes I dream that I'm in Buckingham Palace without a rag on. Nobody noticed me. I was there for one purpose only: to take Eve away. And I couldn't move. I'm not surprised to hear that I looked funny. I'm myself again. What was it I wished to say? Oh yes; we two mustn't let the child be—be abducted."

"Abducted?"

"To put it vulgarly, there must be no baby-snatching. I pray that her Uncle Charlie will leave her with US."

Had this talk taken place immediately after the return from Bournemouth, Sybil would have been amused. Coming so soon after Sir Edward's visit, she was distressed. It was obvious that Mrs. Crampton had no hope whatever of seeing Jim again, and no faith that he would return—if he did return—with apples. Her imagination was lively enough. She could visualise Eve in a ballroom surrounded by men. Not a glimpse had she been vouchsafed of her father. Sir Edward's gift of five pounds to a schoolgirl had significance. One pound would have been a very handsome tip. Really, so Sybil reflected, the fiver had been a grant-in-aid, a contribution to a poor widow's cruse. Accordingly, she replied hesitatingly:

"I do feel with you that Eve might be upset if her uncle whirled her into his family. She is so happy with us. Anyway, she couldn't come out till she is eighteen."

"I know that, dear. I shall make it my business and pleasure to do all I possibly can for her. I pray that she may find in due time a husband like my dear man. You were a child when I married——"

"I was your bridesmaid."

"How proud I was of Tom! Can you recall him as he was then?"

Sybil nodded. She recalled thinking that Fanny might have chosen a younger mate. There must have been fifteen years between bride and groom. Sybil had always thought of him as a man who was born old. But the Veals acclaimed him as an answer to any self-respecting maiden's prayer: a breadwinner, a thriver, standing square to the four winds of heaven.

Aunt Frances continued:

"Young girl though I was, I felt so sure of him, so—so secure. My tower of strength. I shall never look on his like again. But there are—others. I am no snob. I can cross my heart, as we did when we were children, and say *positively* that if a few years hence two men wanted to marry our girl, one a peer of the realm and the other a junior partner in a sound business, I should urge Eve to take the junior partner."

"I—I know you mean that. Girls have changed so much since we were children. Eve will marry the man of her choice not ours."

"Granted . . . I agree. But WE must train her to make the right choice. And then——"

"Yes?"

"You will sell this tiny property and come and live with ME."

The garden gate slammed. Eve tripped through it. The confidential talk was at an end.

### 3

During the summer holidays, Eve, to her delight, came noticeably "on" at tennis. She ceased to be a rabbit. But there was no court at *Meadowsweet*. At *The Gables* Aunt Frances played croquet; her lawn, she pointed out, would be profaned if encircled with netting. Next year, possibly, if Eve behaved herself, Mr. Crampton might provide an *en-tout-cas* court in her sister's meadow, where tennis could be played for nine months in the year. Meanwhile, Quentin Woodward told Eve that his court was hers and gave her a new racquet. He offered to coach her, when he could spare the time; he hoped that Mrs. Golightly, in his absence, would find players and entertain them. Tea would be provided. Sybil accepted this kind invitation with the

approval of Aunt Frances. Eve had a notable experience. Miss Miriam took her and another girl to Wimbledon, to the Centre Court, to witness the Final of the Ladies' Championship. Eve told her mother that she was almost sure she had seen Uncle Charlie in the Royal Box. That, of course, was out of bounds for her. If it were he, he had not seen her.

"Never, Mum, have I had such a marvellous time. If I could play at Wimbledon, I'd work like a slave for five years. It looks so easy. . . . Mim says it's footwork and brainwork. And, if you take your eye off the ball for one second, you're done. It comes to this: the winner must have greater powers of concentration than the loser. I mean to concentrate for all I'm worth. It simply beats me that Aunt Fanny thinks croquet a better game than tennis, and she speaks of tennis as pat-ball. You don't, do you?"

"I don't; but I've been to Wimbledon. Aunt Fanny hasn't."

"Are all the Veals stay-at-homes?"

"A text hung in our nursery: *There's no place like home.* You've had a jolly outing."

"Haven't I? Outing. . . ." She expanded her lungs. "It was an outing. Mim said something. . . . What was it? . . . Oh yes. . . . The Central Court was packed to see two girls play. Mim told us that she could remember when it was half empty, only packed to see men play. She says that's a significant sign of the times. Women are sprinting ahead. Mim is a surprise packet when you get her alone. . . ." Sybil thought, "And so are you." She was sure that the Misses Poindexter were discreet, no advocates of violence in any form. What had Miss Miriam said? she asked.

"Well, she's on the fence, poor darling! The Prof. talks at us; Mim talks to us and with us. The Prof. is more like Aunt Fanny; Mim is more like you."

"Darling, you don't think of me sitting on a fence?"

"You sweet thing, I do. It's the fence between yesterday and tomorrow. Aunt Fanny belongs to yesterday; you don't. Anyway, you never talk about yesterday. But the funny thing is you don't talk about tomorrow."

"She has too sharp wits," thought Sybil. "She's sprinting away from me." Aloud she murmured: "I may not talk, but I think of yesterday and tomorrow. I like listening to you. Go on."

"I love listening to Mim. She divides us, specially the boarders, into sheep and goats. I'm a goat, and on that account,

I mustn't kid myself. A little goat kids herself if she pretends to be a sheep. The sheep, of course, are satisfied with themselves. They flatly believe that this world, and the next, is theirs. Tremayne is a sheep. She thinks the world was made for the Tremaynes. The goats are not so silly. The goats want to hop out of the fold. They jolly well know that when they leave school they must earn a living of sorts; they can't live on their people. Mim calls the goats careerists, a new one on me. I looked it up in a dictionary and couldn't find the word."

"It comes, I think, from America."

"I'll bet it does. The snag, a whopper, is this; we can't all win scholarships. Mim uses a grand word—objectives. A girl must think out for herself what she can do best and go for it. What is my objective? I'm not going to sponge on you. I'd like to be a games mistress. If I learned typewriting and stenog, I might be a secretary to an M.P. If I were clever with my needle, which I'm not, and could draw, I might design and make frocks. I can tell you all I can't do. Maybe you can help me——"

This was a dramatic moment for Sybil, a dramatic moment for any mother not a fool. She realised, ruefully, that she was perched on a fence.

"Do goats," she asked tentatively, "ever think of having a little home of their own?"

Eve's laugh tinkled, but her eyebrows went up.

"That's what the sheep do. All the same it's slushy, even for them, to prattle about weddings. There's one girl . . . we—we call her the *Old Man's Darling*. The silly ass goes bleating about, our prize lamb, telling us she means to marry some old buffer with money to burn; and she'll do the burning. Mum, she's a scream. What hits my funny spot is that she'll do it. She has big pale blue eyes, a piteous mouth and soft white hands. But her chin sticks out."

"I want to help you to help yourself. You say that only a few girls can hope to win scholarships. Miss Poindexter told me that you might win one."

"That does buck me up. What should I do with it, if I did? Become a teacher? Not exciting enough . . . I—I might become a lady journalist . . . What started our talk? . . . Wimbledon. I just know Mim's right. Girls are in the public eye. They despise pat-ball. You do help me when you tell me to help myself. I couldn't talk to Aunt Fanny as I talk to you. She thinks I'm a sheep. Don't tell her I'm a goat."

"I won't."

## 4

Quentin Woodward exercised perhaps greater influence over Eve than Miss Miriam. He, too, was a diligent student of character. During the summer holidays he coached her at tennis and talked to her about books. Eve popped in and out of the Vicarage whenever she had nothing else to do. At first it amused him to note her girlish anxiety to please, till he discovered that it was part of her "make-up", a word often on his lips, a word that had nothing to do with powder and lipstick. He was impatient with parishioners incapable of making up their minds. Eve was not one of them. Make-up to Quentin was the assemblage of parts. The chink in Eve's armour, so he decided, was her wish to please everybody. She didn't court popularity. Her ingratiations were natural. She pleased the Misses Poindexter, her aunt Frances, the villagers and himself! Already Eve's page in the dossier testified that she might be a "star". Quentin kept a rough-and-ready diary. In it he set down no predictions. He thought of it as *Small Beer*: a trickle of comments on parishioners.

*Eve Golightly [he had recorded] is a startling note of interrogation, still a child and curiously sexless. She dashes at life. She may astonish all of us.*

Quentin, during his service in France, had often wondered if Smelfungus could describe *him* as epicene. Mars and Venus were dominating deities in the "lean locked ranks". He had written too many love-letters for Tommy not to know that. Men, almost at the last gasp, had dictated their hope, such a forlorn hope, of returning to their wives and sweethearts. Quentin had never had a sweetheart, too engrossed in his work to find one. Celibacy had been enforced on a young man without independent means. In 1920, an uncle had left him a few thousands; and he was humorously aware that this unexpected windfall had turned him from a curate into a vicar. His bishop had hinted that the right wife could function as second-in-command at Limpley. He assured his lordship that he would take the hint if the right woman presented herself. . . .

The wrong woman had appeared. He kept away from *Meadowsweet* because, to his confounding, he fell in love with another man's wife almost at first sight . . .! To him she was forbidden fruit. He believed that Sybil's husband was dead.



Throughout his life he had been "nice" in his selection of friends, men for the most part, love had imposed itself. Immediately, whether he was aware of it or not, his feelings towards Sybil's child became paternal. When he prepared her for Confirmation, he soon discovered that Eve had a child's faith in God, whom she saw as the Heavenly Father. God, so she affirmed artlessly, was taking care of Daddy; God knew that she wanted Daddy; God chastened his children. All he could do was to assure her that God's will should be omnipotent. . . .

Extremes touch each other comically. Mrs. Crampton was reactionary; Quentin was progressive. But each, from different angles of vision, wanted to keep Eve as she was. Quentin contended that environment, in the formation of character, was more potent than heredity. He, too, may have seen Eve in a Mayfair ballroom. She had chattered to him about her godfather and Uncle Charlie. He saw both with sharpest definition as possible disturbers of the peace. He knew from personal experience that the average man and woman, whether gentle or simple, wriggle along contentedly till they are upset not so much by what they lack but by what others have. He was no advocate of equal distribution of wealth; he hoped that peace, after the Armistice, would bring about a fairer distribution of happiness, more playing-fields for the million, more dancing on village greens, more "time off" for drudges.

On a rainy August morning, he found Eve, wearing apron and cap, and brandishing a broom in the Club-room.

"Filthy weather!" she exclaimed. "I'm playing boy scout—doing my good deed. This room needs a spring-cleaning."

"I take your word for it. *Spring* is at work."

The compliment passed unnoticed.

"I've bust a string in the racquet you gave me. I shall have it back tomorrow. Your fault——"

"Mine?"

"You're teaching me to hit too hard. Yes, your fault and," her eyes sparkled, "a double fault. I just love smashing a ball at the net, but you're always telling me I can't have it both ways. If I hit too hard, the ball goes out of court."

"Sit down."

"You've time for a talk? I've something to say to you. If you can find time to talk to me, why can't you find time to talk to Mum? She's peeved with you."

They sat down. Quentin's cheeks were burning. This was frontal attack.

"Rubbish!" he muttered.

"Aunt Fanny talks about marked attentions. She jaws me because I make myself, so she says, too friendly with strangers. You may not know it, but your inattentions to Mum are *marked*. She has asked you to drop in to tea, but you never do."

"Dear—dear!"

"Yes—two dears who ought to be pally."

She spoke so seriously, with such sincerity, that his heart thumped against his ribs.

"We can't ask you to dine, as Aunt Fanny does, because we dine in the middle of the day. I—I spoke up for you. Men loathe high tea; it wrecks their dinner. All the same, if you knew how much you mean to Mum, you wouldn't give her a miss."

He held his tongue. The priest was at grips with the man, no new experience. It happened nearly every day; as a rule, the priest had the best of it. Eve continued, almost threatening him with the broom she held in her hand, a capable hand.

"Is it awful cheek of me to speak about this?"

"No, no, d-d-definitely not. . . . We two are pals. We must have this out. I shall talk to you frankly, because at the moment you look older than you are."

"Because I'm wearing your Mary's cap and apron? She made me put 'em on."

"You, Eve, are much younger than you appear to be; but your mind . . . your mind is precocious and preconscious——"

"Preconscious. What does that mean?"

"You are conscious of things and—a—situations which girls of your age don't bother about."

"I—I believe I am."

"Also you're a rebel."

"Against what?"

"Against conventions. I admit that conventions are crumbling. Now for the plunge! . . . You can take it from me that an unmarried man is—is asking for trouble if he is too friendly with any woman who lives, as your mother does, alone."

"I know that, but Mum is a married woman and you are the Vicar of Limpley."

"As Vicar, it would upset me if unkind gossip touched her. You know how village tongues wag. I've said enough. You can keep what I've said to yourself." She nodded. "I cannot believe that your mother is *peevish* with me. If she were, she would not talk about it to you."

"She didn't. I—I just guessed. Thank you," she added, demurely. "I'm no longer peeved. I've caught on."

"You broke a string of your racquet smashing a ball. Try not to smash your way to—to——"

"Objectives."

"Go slow. If the rain stops before midday, we may have a single this afternoon. I can lend you a racquet."

He stood up.

"All my benedictions," he murmured. "Have you ever heard of Epicetus?"

"Never."

## CHAPTER FIVE

### I

THE INSCRIPTION ON MANY SUNDIALS STANDING IN LOVELY tranquil gardens, *I mark the sunny hours*, is not, regrettably, a slogan, or even a call, to the chronicler who attempts to portray life as it is. To the worker, a lazy holiday lingers happily in the memory because it is free from incident and accident. There is little to be recorded about the two years preceding Eve's eighteenth birthday. Indeed, as she often remarked: "Nothing ever seems to happen to me." The apprehensions of her mother and aunt that she might be whirled away from *Meadowsweet* by her rich godfather or Uncle Charlie died away. Lady Popham, an "impossible" woman, refused to be "bothered". Jim Golightly, so she told her husband, had dirtied his ticket as his father had done. Jim, of course, was dead. His widow was living in a cottage on tuppence-ha'penny a year; the girl was at school. She deplored the putting of beggars on horseback. It had been her experience that, almost invariably, she had lived to regret her kindest actions. . . . Sir Edward shrugged his shoulders and accepted her decision to do nothing for Eve. Uncle Charlie had no wife to misdirect or quash his interest in two nieces. He never saw them after he left Bournemouth. He died (of a neglected cold) within a year. His will justified an arresting caption in the *Daily Banner*.

### GALLANT WARRIOR DOES NOT FORGET HIS FRIENDS.

He bequeathed £2000 to his manservant, "My friend". No humble friend was forgotten. The General might have sunk his modest capital in an annuity. Such as it was, he divided it

among his less well-to-do kinsfolk. To Eve he bequeathed £1,000, free of legacy duty. What had been known to the few became common knowledge to the many, to everybody in Limpley. Mrs. Golightly's daughter was a cousin of Lord Flam-borough! This incontestable fact added cubits to Eve's social stature among the *Highmount* boarders. Tremayne, for example, acclaimed a junior as her equal.

Eve's reactions to the legacy were negligible compared with her grief over his death, which bewildered Sybil. The girl had spent only a couple of hours in the General's company. Why did she cry her eyes out? Eve's answer distressed Sybil.

"He was such a darling . . . so sweet to me . . . I prayed that we might meet again soon. I thought of him as another daddy. Why does God take away the men I love?"

Sybil repeated what she had said to Quentin, surprised to find him unsurprised.

"She has a heart as yet unplumbed by you. I was so impressed and oppressed by a sentence in the bishop's talk to the girls, 'A girl's heart may be darkest Africa to herself.' If it is darkest Africa to her, what is it to her mother?"

"Oh, dear! You are oppressing me."

"I'm so keen to help you. Keble's lines may have been in the bishop's mind. They are often in mine:

" 'Not e'en the dearest heart and next our own  
Knows half the reasons why we smile or sigh' "

"There's the saddest lilt to them," she murmured. "You can help me. Mrs. Tagg says, 'Our Incumbrance knows more about us than we know about ourselves'."

Quentin laughed.

"Incumbrance is good. I resent being called an Incumbent, which suggests taking things lying down. One mustn't mix up the man with his office. A parson's duty is incumbent on him; and it rests heavily on him. You are trying to peer into Eve's heart, making, perhaps, a mistake common to most mothers. You take for granted that Eve is like yourself. You," his voice was not quite steady, "are the serenest woman I know. Eve may have a livelier imagination——"

"She has."

"Also, I say this diffidently, the girl of today has an angle of vision acute, not obtuse. You can't understand why a jolly hoyden, with nothing sentimental about her, should tear herself to tatters over the death of an old man whom she has only met once."

"It's beyond me."

"You are as strong as you are serene. You have fortitude. Young people instinctively push from them thoughts of death. It would be morbid if they didn't. Eve is sure that her father is alive. The sight of her uncle brought back the man she loves best in the world. Love in all its manifestations is an emotion directed towards an object; an almost uncontrollable desire."

He paused. Sybil wondered why his eyes refused to meet hers. He no longer spoke diffidently but vehemently, as if he were deeply affected by Eve's breakdown.

"My kind friend," she said, "you *are* helping me; I've made a mountain out of a molehill. You've cleared my vision. The sudden death of her uncle brought overwhelmingly to mind the possible death of her father."

"Exactly." He became himself. "But don't enlighten *her*. She has remarkable imagination. As yet she doesn't know what she wants. Her mind is nicely balanced. The sisters tell me that she is as keen about history as she is about tennis. Her antennae touch tentatively past, present and future, but she is still the child of the passing hour. The other day I amused myself with a try-out. I invited her to name the peaks of literature. I pencilled a dozen varying heights on a sheet of note-paper. Against the highest she wrote Louisa Alcott; Jane Austen was not left out; Wells was one of the higher-ups, although she has only read *Kipps* and *Mr. Polly*; Captain Marryatt——"

"She hasn't read *him*."

"His *Children of the New Forest*. She loves *Holiday House* but couldn't remember the name of the author; nor could I. She has read *Westward Ho!* Against the lowest peak she wrote Charlotte M. Yonge."

"At Eve's age, Miss Yonge was my Mount Everest." He made a gesture and chuckled. "Did she overlook Shakespeare?" He nodded. "Did she name one poet?"

"Byron."

"Byron? I've locked up my Byron; her Aunt Frances doesn't possess a copy. You haven't given Eve the run of your books?"

"No. All she knows of Byron are his lines about the ball on the eve of Waterloo. 'There was a sound of revelry by night.'"

"I shall let her read *The Mill on the Floss*."

"I stress one point. She must have a sense of humour, otherwise she couldn't adore Jane Austen."

Sybil thanked him and left the Vicarage.

## 2

This talk took place before Eve learned of her legacy.

We must now, perfunctorily, shake the limp hand of a little snob, Betty Tremayne, not a star in the *Highmount* firmament, in a form to which Eve had attained although nearly two years her junior. None the less, she twinkled. The wag of the school spoke of her as a drop (bit of an acid drop) from the Milky Way. She told the younger girls that Cornish cream was richer than Devonshire cream; she dared to tell Mim that the Prince of Wales ought to call himself Duke of Cornwall. To her disgust, she had been nicknamed Corny. Her first question to Eve after cousinship with an earl had been established was difficult to answer.

"Have you ever been to Flamborough Castle? What? Never? But why not?"

Eve's wits served her faithfully.

"Ask my mother."

"I don't know your mother."

"Have you been there?"

"N-n-no, not yet. My people go there. I suppose you know that Lord Flamborough is your first cousin, once removed. It took me nearly half an hour to make that out. I'm a second cousin. Do you know that he's a Knight of the Garter?"

"Yes."

"Aren't you bucked?"

"Not a bit. As you say, he's my first cousin, once removed. Removed is a humbugging sort of word, isn't it? A girl who lives in a cottage is very much removed, nearly remote, from a big swell who lives in a castle. Do you know that my mother's name, before she married, was Veal?"

"I read that in the Head's *Peerage* yesterday."

"I dare say you're glad you're not a Veal?"

"Don't get ratty. I want to be friendly."

"I'm not ratty. Mr. Woodward says that the Middle Class is now the backbone of England. All the same, I know as well as you do that names count tremendously. I'll tell you this, Tremayne, and you can pass it on to every girl in the school. My Golightly grandfather was cruelly treated by the Head of the family. He—he dropped out and died before I was born. My father resented this. He'd have perished at the stake rather than play sucks with anybody. I met General Golightly at Bournemouth; he had never heard of me. He had lots of nephews

and nieces. He was a dear. I nearly fell dead when I heard he'd left me a thousand pounds."

"When did you hear it?"

"Soon after he died."

"And you kept it to yourself?"

"My mother told me to do so."

"I shall call you Eve; you can call me Betty. A thousand pounds isn't much."

"It would start me in a hat-shop."

"You're talking like a village idiot."

"That's where you slip up badly. I talk to village girls. You're an idiot if you think them idiots."

Betty smiled blandly, sustained by her superiority complex. Secretly, she envied a younger girl cleverer than herself, who looked as if she sprang from the top drawer. Out of Cornwall she was aware that the Tremaynes were not monarchs of all they surveyed.

"You can talk much better than I can. But it makes me sick when you babble about hat-shops. My mother is coming down soon. When I'm eighteen, I shall be presented at court. Later on Mother might present *you*."

Eve's eyes sparkled. Corny, she reflected, was her cousin. She recalled Mrs. Tremayne, the typical *grande dame*, gracious, beautifully gowned, so absolutely sure of herself. But Eve had wondered if her children ever called her Mummie. The Tremaynes had a town house in Portman Square. Eve could visualise herself in a hat-shop; she could also see herself curtsying to her Sovereign. Whatever happened, she would play up and play the game. She returned Corny's smile.

"It's like this, Betty. My fairy godmother gave me one great gift. I'm happy wherever I am."

### 3

The outstanding event during the years at *Highmount* happened in 1928. For the third time Sir Edward appeared at the cottage. His belated news was as bad as it could be. One survivor of the Golightly Expedition had returned to Montevideo. He testified that soon after entering uncharted territory, Indians had attacked them. He had seen Golightly killed after fighting desperately against overwhelming odds. Most of his men died with him. But the life of the witness had been spared, because

he was half Indian. He had been taken prisoner and enslaved. After terrible experiences he had escaped. . . .

Sir Edward looked older; Sybil looked younger, so Eve's godfather thought. She listened to his recital calmly; she shed no tears. After years of suspense, he decided, she must be relieved and resigned. Her serenity astonished him. She bowed her head. After a pause, she whispered:

"The survivor was quite sure that Jim is dead?"

"Yes. He added a significant detail. He appeared to be devoted to Jim, as all his men were. He was beside him when he fell; he told my agent in Montevideo that he thanked the Blessed Virgin that Jim was dead, because if he'd lived——" Sir Edward made a gesture. Sybil shuddered and closed her eyes.

"Enquiries were made about the survivor. He has a wife and children in Montevideo; he is an honest, intelligent fellow. Please allow me to attend to everything. Certain formalities must be observed. Do your solicitors live in London?"

"Yes; I'll give you their address. The senior partner is my cousin, John Veal, but I've not seen him since I left London."

"The death must be announced in *The Times* and *Morning Post*. I—I hold myself partly responsible for this. I urged Jim to begin afresh in a new country."

"I'm sure you did; I should have done the same. I knew from the first that I should never see him again. I—I loved him. . . . I shall always love him. . . . So will Eve. . . . I never heard him say an unkind word of anybody except—except his grandfather, who was so hard, so—so merciless——"

Her voice died away.

"Would to God I'd married a woman like you! You're one in a million. Now, if—if I can help you in any way, in any way——"

She assured him that she needed no help apart from the formalities, adding:

"I live within my means; I have even saved a little. My sister, Mrs. Crampton, has been so generous. Humanly speaking, Eve will be provided for if anything happened to me. Will you stay to satisfy yourself that all is well with her?"

"Forgive me! I can't face her."

In a few minutes he had gone.

4

Eve found her mother still serene. Sir Edward came to *Meadowsweet* a month or two after General Golightly's death.



What Sybil so dreaded, another breakdown, was spared her. Eve clung to her, hardly thinking of self, transformed into a ministering angel."

"We have each other, darling; nothing else matters."

A friend presented himself—Quentin Woodward. Torn though she was by suppressed emotions, Sybil recalled what he had said, difficult to accept as true at the time. Quentin had penetrated into undiscovered country. It was not the death of a comparative stranger that had provoked an hysterical outburst of grief. Eve, subconsciously, had been overwhelmed by the conviction that her father would never come back. . . .

Too often bathos lends a sharper edge to pathos. Eve, presently, put a natural question:

"Ought we to pull the blinds down? Are we to go into mourning?"

"No."

Humour is irrepressible, even at funerals.

"What," Eve asked, "will Mrs. Tagg say?"

"Mrs. Tagg?"

"She loves her 'blacks'. After the death of her 'first' she wore them, so she told me, till her 'second' began courting her. All the old dears in the village will be shocked if—if we try to carry on as usual."

"I—I can't believe that——"

"Aunt Frances is so old-fashioned."

Sybil was swift to make up her mind, the swifter because she spent little time in making up her face.

"Your father, Eve, died three years ago, and we must ask ourselves what he would wish us to do."

"You're always right, always."

"He hated to see me in blacks. He used to scoff at Court mourning. I played a joke on him——"

"Tell me, please. I used to call him the Joky Man."

"He might tell it, if he were here——"

"Maybe he is here."

"When we lived in Green Street, each Sunday, after church, we used to walk in Hyde Park. In those days men wore frock-coats. Your father had a grey frock-coat. . . . How handsome he looked in it! . . . Strolling along the Ladies' Mile we passed a youngish man with a band of crape on the sleeve of his frock-coat. This annoyed your father. He said that crape could be worn by officers on the sleeve of a red coat, that only a scug would wear it with civilian kit."

"What is a scug?"

"It's Etonian for a cad. I thought he was making a fuss about nothing. He said he'd cut his throat sooner than advertise himself as an outsider. Well," she smiled faintly, "next day we were going to the Royal Academy. He went to the office as usual. He had the afternoon off. I knew that he would change after luncheon. So I sewed on to the wrong sleeve a broad band of crape, and put his smart clothes on the bed."

"Mum——!"

"Everything happened according to plan. He dashed upstairs and changed. I had a gardenia for his buttonhole. We decided to walk from Green Street to the Royal Academy. We peacocked down Piccadilly. I was giggling, because the crape on his arm made some of the older men stare at him, but he thought they were staring at me. Then, as we were approaching the Burlington Arcade, a hansom cab, one of the last, passed us and the horse bolted. Your father said my hat had made him bolt. That was my chance. So I whispered, 'What you have on your sleeve made him bolt.' When he saw the band, he bolted. We didn't visit the Academy."

Eve laughed. Her poor mother looked miserable.

"It is a funny story, Mum."

"Told at the wrong time. What possessed me? What must you think of me? Am I utterly heartless?"

"If you cry, I shall howl. You wanted to make plain to me that Daddy would hate to have us wear mourning. And you've done it."

She kissed away the tears in her mother's eyes.

## 5

What Mrs. Tagg thought she did not keep to herself. When the announcement of James Golightly's death appeared in the papers, Limpley expected the outward and visible signs of bereavement. However, in the case of Aunt Frances sense vanquished sensibility.

"Dear Sybil, this is nobody's business but your own. Widow's weeds are, I agree, out of order. Black and white would suffice, or—or grey, which is so becoming to you."

"I've never worn gay frocks. I'm sorry to disappoint the village."

"Not another word."

Quentin came to the cottage.

He came as parson hoping that he could talk like a friend. Praise was his penance for feeling like a man. At once, to his relief, Sybil spoke of Eve, but he realised that her heart would never be seen on her sleeve. He could understand her serenity. She began as soon as she was alone with him in the parlour.

"You are a wizard." The word at the time had not been debased by girlish abuse. "Eve's calmness distressed me till I remembered what you had said."

"What did I say?"

"Darkest Africa——! A girl's heart . . . How a man, a still young man, could see into that beats me. Mentally, you must have long sight and foresight. The death of her uncle was hardly in her mind; the conviction that her father must be dead drove her mad with misery. There was something else. When I was her age I couldn't escape from myself. I respected my father more than I loved him. When he died, after my marriage, I—I hated myself."

"Why?"

"You can't guess?"

"No."

"I'm speaking to my vicar. I had married against my father's wishes. He had given me no allowance. Jim was able to support me, but I knew even then that he might lose his money. I was terrified that my father might disinherit me. He never spoke of money. Till his will was read I couldn't think of him lovingly . . . I thought of the money I wanted. . . . You look so stern, and no wonder."

"M'm . . . I've a forbidding countenance. I was frowning at myself, at the Mr. Hyde in me. Money, not much, came to me when I wanted it badly. I have felt as you felt——"

"You hated yourself?"

"I'm a greater sinner than you. I didn't. I am more abased now. I thought I could discern the finger of Providence. I can say to you, only to you, that ever since I took Orders I have realised the danger of the parson dominating the man."

"Danger?"

"What do the vulgar call us? Devil-dodgers. We are . . . We dodge the devil by quoting texts from Scripture: a reverend vice. Some of us kid ourselves that if our right hand does its duty, the left will take care of itself. I can cite a case where a parson tried to dodge the devil, which will help you to forget a backsliding. It happened in my own family. There was an old

lady, a widow, with about fifty thousand pounds invested in gilt-edged securities. She had two children, a boy and a girl. When she became a widow, she divided her money, share and share alike, between the children; and she made no secret of this. In time both children married. The girl married a friend of mine and had several children; the mother lived with her till she died. The boy married a parson's daughter; he saw little of his mother, who lived to be an old woman. When the mother died, it was found that long ago she had divided her securities equally, but with this result. The securities apportioned to the boy had much enhanced in value; the securities left to the girl had diminished. The son inherited two-thirds of the fortune and the daughter one-third. If you had been invited to make an equitable settlement, what would you have done?"

Sybil answered quickly:

"The mother wished her children to share alike?"

"She had said so again and again, but the wish was not set down in the will."

"Did that make a difference?"

"In law, yes. All of us felt as you do, except the parson, the boy's father-in-law, a Canon, a big gun whom we all respected. He dodged the devil. He said that Omniscience had seen to it that the larger share should go to his daughter's husband. And it did."

"Did the daughter go to law about it?"

"No; she accepted the Canon's decision. You are too polite to ask how this affected me. You see they were all people I knew. Granting that the Canon was getting ga-ga, his son-in-law was a good fellow, but he wanted the extra cash and got it. His right hand grabbed it; his left should have withered. It upset me horribly."

"It upsets me. I hate myself more than ever for thinking of my father's money more than I did of him."

To her surprise his too grim face relaxed. He held up his hand; he spoke as he spoke from the pulpit.

"Sybil Golightly, as your vicar I enjoin you to stop hating any sinner. Hate not him but his sin."

He laughed, as a boy laughs, as if he were making fun of himself. She was delightfully conscious that she had received plenary absolution but, being a woman, she had to say a little more.

"You can call me Sybil, if you like——"

"Provided you call me Quentin. Do you know what Quentin means? You don't? The fifth. I was my father's fifth child."

"Are you glad your name is not Septimus? I can't wean my thoughts from money. If I had five children, I should think of nothing else. My married life would have been so much happier if Jim and I had lived here. I don't think he wanted to make money for himself; he wanted to make it, lots and lots of it, for me. And I knew he wasn't a money-maker."

Once more he spoke vehemently:

"Put all that from you. Be what God intended you to be."

"What did He intend me to be?"

He paused. During three long years she had been forbidden fruit. In the eyes of all men she was now a widow. This was the first time they had met alone since the announcement of Jim's death. Maddening though it might be, anything approximating to courtship would be indecent. Months would have to roll by before he could relax the hold he had on himself. Nevertheless, her question had to be answered.

"Obviously a helpmate. How can a woman play that difficult part? I—I use the word in a wider sense than you do. You are Eve's helpmate; I pay you no idle compliment when I tell you that you are a helpmate to your sister and many others. You might have been another Florence Nightingale. The ministering instinct is strong in you. What we try to do is so much more important than what we do. Promise should outstrip performance. You are in your right setting."

She protested.

"I do so little."

"You work for others. I came here prepared to find you at a low ebb. I dislike the common expression 'below par'. What is par? To me a self-satisfied condition. I find your tide rising. Had I found you woebegone, crumpled up, I should have been disappointed."

"I crumpled up when Jim left me."

He went his ways.

6

Six weeks later another event, outstanding to Sybil, must be set down. Mrs. Crampton was a writer of notes: peremptory notes. She wrote to Sybil:

*My dear,*

*As you are aware, my neighbours respect my wish to be left alone on Sunday afternoon. I have a matter of importance to*

*talk over with you. You can send our darling to the Young People's Club.*

*Yours lovingly,  
Fanny.*

Sybil, on the following Sunday, found Mrs. Crampton in the drawing-room at her well-plenished tea-table. Above the mantelpiece hung a portrait of "my Tom". Whenever Sybil looked at it, she wondered if Frances would have been a different woman had she married Jim. Probably not, but he might have been a different man. Tom had been painted wearing the robes of an Alderman of the City of London. Had he lived, he might have burgeoned into Lord Mayor. After tea, the sisters sat on a sofa. Frances took Sybil's hand as she said:

"I have made another will." Mrs. Crampton continued: "Apart from legacies to servants and so forth, I have left everything to YOU."

"Why to me?"

"Tch! If you can't guess, you—you force me to say what may hurt you. You are now a widow; and I have the greatest faith in your commonsense. No fools, thank God, in our family. I have talked matters over with John Veal. He pointed out something which had not occurred to ME. The Lord Chancellor's attention should be directed to it. It seems that an heir to any fortune, large or small, can betake himself or herself to unscrupulous moneylenders, borrow money at exorbitant rates of interest and eventually inherit NOTHING."

"You can't see me doing that? Anyway, I'm immensely touched by your confidence in me; and—and you have a perfect right to leave your money to anybody."

"Quite—quite; nothing more need be said."

But more was said. Veals liked to thresh things out. There was a shocking instance of a husband returning after years of absence. What was his name? Yes, yes, Enoch Arden. Surely Shakespeare had written about him?

"He wrote about the Forest of Arden in *As You Like It*."

"True. Your memory is better than mine. Where were we? I wanted to say that our little girlie is not a Veal. I ask myself 'Has she the right sense of direction?' I have it; you have it. ALL the Veals have it. Our station in life contents us. Eve's zest for—for exciting experiences distresses me."

"I had it at her age. Mr. Woodward speaks of her as a good mixer."

"So she told me. Our Vicar is a gentleman and a public school man, but he is, unquestionably, too much of a mixer. Indeed, I hold HIM partly responsible for the change I notice in the child."

"I see no change."

Thus challenged, Mrs. Crampton paused before she replied, glancing about her, sustained and fortified by her environment. Nothing in the room was out of place. Each piece of solid furniture stood where it had stood in Tom's lifetime. In a glazed bookcase, under lock and key, were handsomely bound volumes never read. The sofa on which the ladies were sitting was no becushioned chesterfield. In a cabinet were a few specimens of eighteenth-century porcelain. The sometime Alderman, looking down upon what had been his possessions, appeared, by the complacent expression on his face, to be saying: "I am happily at home amongst the things I bought and paid for."

"In your parlour, dear, a thought too gay for me, do you fuss about rearranging it?"

"No; Eve loves doing that."

"Pre-cisely. I was sure of it," she smiled triumphantly. "She left it as you arranged it, most tastefully, till quite recently. The other day, last Saturday, she had tea here with me. I was merely amused, not vexed, when she tried to coax me—she has beguiling ways—to alter the character of MY drawing-room."

"The—character?"

"Yes; she suggested my buying half a dozen silk cushions to be piled up on this sofa."

"A sin against the spirit of *The Gables*. You weren't too harsh with her?"

"I wasn't . . . I was not. I merely told her that her dear uncle would turn in his grave, and she kissed me. But you must admit it was a—a STRAW, indicating the direction of the current."

"You alarmed me, Fanny. I must prepare you. She might in the near future ask permission to smoke a cigarette here."

"Gracious! You allow her to smoke cigarettes?"

"Not yet. Soon she will do what other girls of her age do."

"Oh, dear! I suppose she will. Tobacco smoke has never polluted this room."

7

Before we take leave of a schoolgirl, we must touch briefly upon the most exciting experience of her early maidenhood. Mrs. Tremayne came to *Highmount*. With the Head's permission, she

took Betty and Eve to Guildford for a "tuck in" at a confectionery establishment. She was "awfully decent" to Lord Flamborough's first cousin, once removed, graciously acknowledging kinship. After tea, she said to Eve:

"I haven't time to call on your mother, but I hope she will let you come to us for a week in Cornwall. I shall write to her. As you know, Betty is leaving school. But she is keen that you should come to us next holidays, and we'll do our best to entertain you."

"Oh-h-h! I'd love to come. But Betty must have told you we live in a cottage; we're poor as church mice. I've never been away from Mum for more than a night or two. I've only one evening frock, and that looks like a last year's birds' nest."

"We want you, not your frock."

Is it surprising that Aunt Fanny urged her sister to accept the kind invitation when it came? Sybil displayed Veal obstinacy. She was too sure that Fanny would feel as she did, as the Vicar did. Perhaps it was indiscreet to mention that good mixer, but he mixed with humble folk and said forthrightly: "The little more, and how much it is. This visit to Tremayne Court may whet slumbering appetites. I'm against it." However, Mrs. Crampton dealt with HIM according to HER lights. "Our grandmother, Sybil, would have exclaimed 'Tut—tut!' Eve has been too friendly with village girls, too often in and out of not too clean cottages. I guess what bothers you. The long expensive journey and the—the replenishment of our darling's wardrobe. That will be my affair."

It was.

Eve returned home aglow.

"I do hope you missed me," she said to her mother. "I've had a marvellous time. Seeing is believing. I couldn't have believed people could live so beautifully. They're not grand. But, whether there are guests or not in the big house, everything goes on the same. They were ever so kind. I really felt 'out'. I was out. But the funny thing is I didn't feel an outsider. I was treated as one of the family. They want me to go to them again—and again. Uncle Quint has a down on the leisure class. Why?"

"I can't tell you."

"I had a queer hunch——"

"Yes?"

"It seemed to me that Daddy belonged to them."

"He did."



## CHAPTER SIX

## I

EVE WAS HEAD OF THE SCHOOL WHEN SHE LEFT *HIGHMOUNT*. Quentin spoke of her as "head lad". She might have won a scholarship, but the family doctor told Sybil that Eve would win it at the expense of her health. She had outgrown her strength. Aunt Fanny was, as usual, outspoken:

"No regrets, Sybil, none. Bluestockings make me feel blue. A little learning is a dangerous thing. Solomon said so."

Sybil did not correct her sister. Eve, she knew, would not drink deep at the Pierian spring; she slaked her thirst at half a dozen springs. Mrs. Crampton went on:

"I must do what is alien to me—pull strings. Mrs. Barrington-Smyth will answer the bell. Her young people are well-mannered. . . . The Wilmots are under slight obligations to me. I lent the Colonel my hand mowing-machine, which he has not as yet returned. Lady Olive Vallance has a nice-looking boy who has just left Cambridge. I shall give a *thé dansant*. Later on, perhaps, a *ball*."

These friends and acquaintances lived on the Hog's Back. They regarded themselves as the *crème de la crème*. Lady Olive Vallance had called on Sybil. Mrs. Wilmot was, so Eve said, not cream but a "scream". Sybil had lunched once at *The Towers*, which had only one tower. During luncheon Mrs. Wilmot had said to her husband: "Shall I take out the Fiat this afternoon?" She spoke as if the Wilmots owned a fleet of cars. The Colonel replied, "As it's the only car we have, you will." The Barrington-Smyths had been friendly.

"A ball, Fanny——? A Cinderella dance would not upset your staff?"

"Fiddle! If you entertain, do it bang up."

Seldom did Mrs. Crampton use the vulgar tongue. Obviously, she was excited, almost rejuvenated.

"I can do so little," Sybil murmured.

"It's my affair. Oris is only young once. Mind you, I've looked forward to this. Something must be done for YOU. No man would take you to be Eve's mother. YOU must come out. Yes, yes," she chuckled, "I shall speak of Eve and you as MY girls."

"Thank you, Mummie."

"I'm serious. Why should my sister take a back seat?"

"Suppose she likes her back seat?"

"I refuse to suppose anything of the kind. Messing about in Limpley, washing dishes at the Vicarage, seems to have agreed with you, but you're getting tired of playing Martha."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because you're, as Eve would say, slacking off. I happen to know that you don't go to the Vicarage as often as you did."

This was true. Some six months after Limpley accepted Mrs. Golightly as a widow, Quentin had asked her to marry him. To his dismay, quietly but firmly, she had refused to do so. Terrified of losing a staunch friend, she was constrained to let him down easily. Men and women nearing middle age are not immune from the shafts of the godlet; it is indeed the dangerous age for them. Both Quentin and Sybil, each in their own way, were humorously sensible that ridicule might be their penance if hearts were discerned on sleeves. Gossip had not linked them together. Eve, who now addressed the vicar as "Uncle Quint", had never suspected that friendship might warm into love. If the parson refused to accept "No" for an answer, he was careful to keep his optimism to himself.

Sybil smiled, as La Gioconda might have smiled.

"Think what you like, Fanny. A *thé dansant* will binge us all up."

Next morning Mrs. Wilmot read a letter at breakfast. Her two girls were at the table. The Colonel, not at his best so early in the day, was reading *The Times* propped up in front of him.

"Arthur——"

"My dear?"

"I have a note from Mrs. Crampton——"

"Tchah! I know what's in it. I forgot to return that damned mowing-machine."

"Really? How like you——! But she's the last woman to make a fuss over that. Girls—you will be as astonished as I am. Stop chattering! I'll read the note aloud."

"Dear Mrs. Wilmot,

"As you know, my little niece, whom I regard as a child of my house, has left Highmount. I want to give her a party. 'Throw it', so she would say. Can I bespeak your help? You have given recently two *thés dansants* which were all they should be. It would be so kind and neighbourly of you, if you would drop in at

any hour in the afternoon which suits your convenience and talk the matter over, cosily, with me. Give me a tinkle.

"Very sincerely yours,

"Frances Crampton."

The Colonel spoke first. His shrewd grey eyes were twinkling. He was of opinion that his wife's parties were not all they should be.

"I know our formidable neighbour better than you do, Edith. She means to go one better than you do."

"A most uncharitable remark, Arthur. You wouldn't have made it after dinner. I—I—shall see to it that nothing so upsetting to me happens."

But it did happen.

The Colonel plotted and planned that it should happen. Mrs. Wilmot went to the telephone as soon as she left the dining-room; the Colonel went to a shed in his garden. *The Gables* was situated within five minutes' walk of *The Towers*. The Colonel smoked his pipe whilst his gardener oiled the borrowed machine. To the man's amazement, his master told him chucklingly that he would trundle the machine to *The Gables*. Presently he did so. Milly opened the front door.

"I have brought back the borrowed goods. I should like to thank your mistress, if she can see me at this early hour."

The Colonel was shown into the drawing-room. Within a minute or two Aunt Frances, wearing workmanlike tweeds, was shaking hands with him. After apologising for his negligence, he said in a jolly voice:

"Edith read your note to us at breakfast."

"She rang me up half an hour ago. She is coming this afternoon. I have never given a little hop in this room. Under the carpet is an oak floor. The musicians can play in the bay window."

*The musicians——!*

The Colonel stroked his chin. At *The Towers*, the young people danced to the strains of a gramophone. He felt heartened.

"Musicians," he repeated.

"You can help me, Colonel——"

"That's why I'm here. I can and I will help you over the tippie. We give the youngsters cider cup, my own brew. No parlourmaid can be trusted to make cocktails or cups. One musician, my dear lady, an active piano-thumper, will do the trick."

"No; I've set my heart on three: a pianist, a violinist, and a 'cellist."

"Good! Very good! You mean to make whoopee?"

"Well, strictly between ourselves, I do."

"You shall."

"Do you suggest two cups? Cider and—*and* claret?"

"Would you like to spring a surprise on your guests, old and young?"

"Again, between ourselves, I should."

"I have a recipe for pineapple punch. What matters enormously is the bowl——"

"I have no bowl."

"The bowl is the big surprise. It has never been seen on the Hog's Back. Don't think of it as a bowl. Let us speak of it as an altar."

"An altar?"

"It could stand in the hall. I could stand behind it, brandishing a beribboned soup-ladle. Listen——!"

"I'm all attention."

"You take the biggest block of ice you can get, a chunk about a yard square. You place it in a bath——"

"Bless my soul! A—bath?"

"Yes; one of those round shallow tubs which were in every nursery when I was a boy."

"How you carry me back! I have one of those baths. I regard it as a museum piece. The block of ice is put in the bath because the ice melts."

"Yes. You fill the bath with earth, make a mound, and pop the block of ice on top. The mound must be covered with moss. You festoon the block with a wreath of roses. Then, you see your altar——"

"But I don't see the bowl."

"You will in a jiffy. Just before your guests arrive I shall take a red-hot poker, I shall need more than one, and make a hole in the ice, a whacking hole. Into the hole I pour the pineapple punch which I shall have ready in your pantry."

"The punch, Colonel, mustn't be too strong."

"But it must be—intoxicating. I mean, well—er—a punch must have a punch in it. You get me? But I shall ladle it out. No second helpings for the girls."

"I know I can trust you. How do you make the punch?"

"It's nectar. It's better than any cocktail. The idea is this: you want to start your party joyously. Tell it not in

Gath, but our young people are sticky. At our parties they never get going till the show is nearly over. Your little gal is a corker. She reminds me of a first-growth claret, breed, elegance, vinosity. But my gals—help! I shall ask for three pines and a sharp knife. Two I shall cut, after peeling, into small dice. They must soak in rum for twenty-four hours. If you've no old Jamaica rum in your cellar, I'll sneak in a bottle. This is what flavours the punch. Strain it and pour into the bowl. Sweeten with a clear syrup. The punch must look brilliant. Add half a small bottle of Curaçao. Stir well. Then, at the last minute, you pour in the pop."

"Champagne——?"

"Not the best. That would be sacrilege. No; the sort of light stuff you'd take to a race-meeting. I suggest Vouvray; you can buy it at any good grocer's. When the bowl brims, add thin slices of the third pineapple and a few strawberries."

"It sounds delicious, I believe I shall want two helpings. But the young people must be rationed. Wouldn't it be wise to add a little soda-water?"

"Most unwise. I repeat—trust me. And let this be a secret between us."

"I can't thank you enough. Mrs. Wilmot will help me over the food. I shall get the ices from Gunter's. I could get a cake from Buzzard's, and—and—just to tempt you to forget your dinner—a *croûte* of *foie-gras* from Fortnum's."

The Colonel lost his head and, dare we say? his heart. He spoke with conviction.

"You need no help from my wife." However, at the risk—nay, the certainty—of inflicting acute suffering on the lady who ruled supreme at *The Towers*, he gripped opportunity. "Steady the Buffs! May an old buffer tell you that such generous provision and prevision soar above a *thé dansant*."

"Dear—dear! If you say so, it must be so."

"I say so emphatically. To me a *thé dansant* is on all fours with a fork-luncheon. Both are violations of Edwardian hospitality as we knew it. We went to the bat at the right time. Scrap this make-believe dance. Some of the boys may come in flannels. Have a pukkha hop. Call it a Cinderella dance—nine to twelve. No sit-down supper . . . A buffet in the hall. Give the young 'uns a chance. Snug sitting-out corners. . . . Magic lanterns in the conservatory. 'In the gloaming, oh, my darling.' Bridge for the old 'uns."

"Colonel——! I'll do it."

She did it.

The morning after the dance Eve made her mother laugh.

"I feel," she said, "as Mrs. Tagg told me she'd felt after she buried her first."

"You have a hangover?"

"Not I. Mrs. Tagg spread herself. It wasn't the middle-age spread. After the funeral she provided," Eve mimicked Mrs. Tagg to the life, "sherry-wine, stout, beer, a nice bit of cold pork and a fat roly-poly pudding. She told me she'd given Mr. Stebbins a 'send-off'. That's what Aunt Fanny has done for me. She threw the fiercest party ever given on the Hog's Back. And the pineapple punch made us gay as gazeekas before we tasted it."

"The dance was given for you; and you enjoyed it more than anybody else. Auntie and I were proud of you."

"I danced every dance. Lady Olive said my frock was the prettiest in the room."

Aunt Fanny had given the frock, insisting that it should be made in London. It was delightfully becoming to a girl with dark eyes and hair and a clear but slightly pale skin, "built up" with varying shades of pink *crêpe de Chine*.

"Mum, I knew it was the prettiest frock."

"How did you know that?"

"Because not one girl cracked it up, but all the men did; not the boys, the men. Mrs. Wilmot was catty. She told me that a girl ought to wear white at a coming-out party. She also asked me if you had made it."

"Damn Mrs. Wilmot!"

"Mummie!"

"That woman damns herself whenever she opens her mouth. What did the Colonel tell you?"

"He said he wanted to kiss me; and he did, with his own wife looking on."

"I'm not surprised she was catty to you. How did you get on with your boy partners?"

"Not too well. I loved my dance with the Colonel, a valse, and I had a ripping polka with Uncle Quint. Do all boys talk about themselves?"

"With rarest exceptions, they do."

"I know so few boys."

Sibyl wondered if this were the right moment to speak frankly about young men. Till she met Jim young men had bored her. Eve was in bed. She had slept soundly from one till ten. She was now wide-awake and eager to get up. Her mother sat on the bed. On the previous evening Mrs. Crampton had said to her: "The pink frock is worth every penny I paid for it, but I do wish there was more inside it." Fashion decreed that lines should banish curves. Eve was too slim. An anxious mother wanted to talk about nourishing foods. She found herself talking about the few young men with whom she had a nodding acquaintance. Evan Vallance played tennis and golf with Eve. She could use him as a peg.

"How many dances did you give Evan?"

"Two, but the greedy pig took four. And he dances vilely."

"Was he—flirty?"

"He's going into the Diplomatic. I think he wanted to cuddle up, but I put the kibosh on that. So he talked about himself. It worried me. I could write his life on one sheet of notepaper. He spent four years at Harrow. Nothing ever happened to him till he went to Harrow. At Harrow only one thing matters: if you're not a 'blood', you'd better stick your head into a gas oven."

"He became a 'blood'?"

"That's what worries me. He didn't. He's no good at games. But he became a monitor. He—swatted. The Prof. would pat him on the back. It's a cert that he'll pass his exam; he's at a crammer's. But, Mum, he must be a boob."

"A boob?"

"If you let him talk to you, you'd say so. What he can do fairly well doesn't interest him. He's miserable, abject, because at cricket he gets bowled by the first ball. He has what Mim loathes: an inferiority complex."

She giggled.

"Why are you giggling?"

"I—I can't tell you."

"Try."

"All right. After the first dance, we sat out on the stairs. He tried to grab my hand. I made allowances for him; he's only a beginner. Then he started 'tangle-toes', a new game to me, but Betty Tremayne had mentioned it. So I whispered: 'Will you be kind enough to leave my new slippers alone?' I said it with a smile. He blushed. I was sorry for him when he stuttered out: 'S-s-sorry—a good-looker like you hates to be touched by a worm.'"

"Poor fellow!" murmured Sybil.

"But that's what bothers me. He isn't poor. He'll have four hundred a year if he passes his exam. He can talk three languages, French, German and English. It's devastating that he can't say anything worth listening to in any one of them. Why should he be a worm?"

"Darling, last night you crossed the brook; you are today a young woman and as unconscious of your sex as you were yesterday. You have become, thank God! an out-door girl. Obviously this young Vallance is an indoor man. And, worse, he's wrapped up in himself. Before you left *Highmount*, you told me that the Head had a talk with you——"

"She did. She warned me against myself, just as you do. Uncle Quint told me if I took good care of my thoughts, my acts would take care of themselves. The Head said nothing, or next to nothing, about men or boys. Are boys so different from girls?"

"Aunt Fanny would say so. She took care of her thoughts when she sucked acid drops. I—I didn't. I believe, although I don't like to say so to you, that . . . that . . ."

"You can say anything to me."

"Very well. Mentally, a boy may be stronger than a girl; spiritually a girl may be stronger than a boy, but—but in nearly everything that concerns the flesh there is little difference between them. It's so difficult to talk to you, because when I was your age, girls were trained to be unnaturally modest. Now the pendulum has swung the other way. This shocks your Aunt Fanny; but it doesn't shock me."

"I'm ever so glad it doesn't. If Evan asked me to lunch at the Berkeley and do a matinée with him, would you let me go?"

"So far as I'm concerned, yes, but we should have to consider your aunt, who has been so kind to us. She would be dreadfully distressed. You said that Evan was flirty and a novice. You will meet men who may make love to you so cleverly that you will mistake love for friendship. It is questionable whether or not friendship is possible between a man and a woman. Now, hop out of bed. I want to run my fingers over you."

Eve obeyed at once, standing erect in front of her mother.

She was wearing silk pyjamas, another gift from Mrs. Crampton. Sybil began at her neck and ended at her ankles.

"You ought to weigh at least a stone more than you do. I can feel every rib; you have the body of a skinny boy, no soft flesh anywhere."

"I'm hard as nails and proud of it. Feel my biceps. My



calves are as they should be. I do physical jerks night and morning."

"Stop bucking about yourself. Your breakfast will be ready in half an hour. Take off your pyjamas when I leave the room, and have a good look at yourself."

Sybil left the room. Eve, in Eve's nudity, surveyed herself from tip to toe.

"Mum's right," she muttered. "I do look like a ha'porth of soap after a hard day's washing."

None the less, she sang in her bath.

### 3

After a second and third visit to the Duchy, Eve dismissed from a too prehensile mind all thoughts of hat-shops and earning a living "on her own". Betty enjoined her to "get on to herself".

"I hate to hear you talk like a girl behind a counter. You're Mrs. Crampton's lamb, Auntie's prize packet, a lovely present for a good boy. I might earn a living of sorts as a mannequin. I'm a Tremayne; you're a Golightly. My father says that the gentlemen of England must stick together. So must the ladies. Do you know what we're up against? Of course you don't; but Father does. Our innings is nearly over. A sort of cads' carnival, so Father says, is round the corner. If Mr. Ramsay MacDonald becomes Prime Minister, anything may happen."

Eve was not unimpressed. Mr. Tremayne was an M.P. Of politics Eve knew nothing. Anyway, the daughter of an M.P. must know much more than she did. Veal commonsense provoked a mild protest.

"But, Corny, if our innings is nearly over, if the wild men come into power, we, you and I, will have to earn our living."

"It's not quite as bad as that. We may be horribly over-taxed, but do, please, talk to Father."

It is characteristic of Eve that she did, and significant that Mr. Tremayne talked to her as he never talked to his daughter. He was stiff and starchy with young people, but he could relax.

"Ah! You have Eve's curiosity."

"Yes, I have. Betty asked me to talk to you. Why did you speak of a cads' carnival?"

"I ought to ask for time to answer such a question. I didn't use that expression before the servants. I should be a cad if I did. To you I withdraw it."

"To me?"

"When I entered the House, years ago, it was reputed to be the best club in Europe. *Punch* now speaks of it as the House of Awfully Commons. Members then, for the most part, were public school men. Cads' carnival is too harsh. Mr. MacDonald is not a cad. What I so apprehend is a carnival of unreason, a festival of inexperience. I am confident, my dear, that such a carnival, if it comes, will be of brief duration. It may imperil, for a season, what we speak of as—securities; the ownership of land, vested interests. Don't bother your little pate about such matters. We shall worry through as usual."

Eve left her host uplifted. He had treated her as a "grown-up". Why, she asked herself, was Corny so brainless? Why was Mr. Tremayne so silent at his own dinner-table? He might talk over her head, but he interested her immeasurably more than did his wife and Betty. It is said of Mr. Winston Churchill that, as a boy, he made friends with men. An only child, Eve saw little of other children. At *Highbury* from the first she had found herself the youngest in her form. *Live and learn* was the slogan of the Misses Poindexter. So it is not surprising that a girl keen to do both found young people of her own age rather boring.

4

Before she left school it was a disappointment to Eve that she had never been asked to visit the Tremaynes in Portman Square. Betty, however, assigned a reason for this. "If you ever have a town house, old thing, *don't* have a spare room. We have only one, and some poor relation is always in it." Not a tactful remark to Miss Golightly——! In due time, Betty curtsied to her Sovereign and embarked gaily on her first season. She wrote screeds to Eve, for whom she professed undying affection, describing her adventures and misadventures. Probably it never occurred to her that her quest for "apples" might sharpen Eve's appetite. One sample will suffice:

*Dearest Evie,*

*I do wish we could have a long heart-to-heart. I'm having a marvellous time; and it bothers me to think of you, poor darling, on the b——y old treadmill. When you come out, we must whoop things up for you. Of course, it isn't all strawberry jam. I haven't your guts. I mean I get a bit fed-up having to grin like a Cheshire*

cat when I dine out and find myself between two blighters. Mother rubs it in that I'm an 'expensive'. I wish you could see my frocks. You'll have to laugh when I tell you I'm learning to drive tandem. I have two geegees—one a thoroughbred, the other is a bit hairy at the heel; but rich. The leader, a Guardee, is frisky; the other plods along. You can tell the girls—don't forget to tell old Mim, who has a down on me—that I've had my first proposal. I had it—keep this to yourself—because the gentleman was tight! It happened after supper at a big ball. He's a Bart. I won't tell you his name, and we had only met once before at Ranelagh, where he behaved himself. He had the cheek to kiss me. I was furious. Then he proposed——! I told him off properly. Then I was so rattled I raced back to Mother and told her. You know Mother. She dealt with the idiot there and then. But—never give me away—the joke is devastatingly on me. Muzzy though he was, he apologised to Mother and told her he'd mistaken me for another girl! Can you beat it? Mother told him, without mincing words, that he was blind to the wild; and he did a swift bunk.

I'm on the hop all the time. Father says 'les affaires sont les affaires', Choctaw to an innocent like you. He means that business is business, that it's Mother's business to marry me off. Father is sniffy about it. He doesn't grudge the expense, but he's so damned old. He'd like me to marry a Cornish squire, or even a squireen. Mother is too ambitious for me. And there it is! My frisky leader says I'm a "Yes, Mamma" girlie. He got one for that.

Ever thine,  
Betty.

Let the Brains Trust answer, if it can be answered, a question: "Why is it that folly exercises too often influence over wisdom?" Professor Joad or our greatest dramatist might reply: "Because folly for ever is on the wing, whereas wisdom stays at home." Eve had a measure of wisdom acquired at school and at home. She would have repudiated the suggestion that Corny influenced her. And yet, she did stimulate an imagination which needed no spur. Eve loved her mother's cottage, but Corny whirled her out of it. . . .

Soon after the Cinderella dance, Betty Tremayne, in the middle of her second Mayfair season, was married. She asked Eve to be her bridesmaid; she entreated her best friend to spend a week, the week preceding her marriage, in the spare room which was such comfortable harbourage to poor relations. Sybil's misgivings were over-ruled by her sister.

"I'm all for it," said Mrs. Crampton. "We do our best, but, as Colonel Wilmot puts it, we are—stodgy, his word. If our Eve's smart cousins can brighten her life, so be it. A week in Portman Square ought to be an experience. My dear Tom, when we went to Paris thirty years ago, said that a too short visit 'biggened' both of us. It had one notable effect on ME."

"Yes?"

"Yes, indeed. I had a girlish urge to see Paris, to—to find out if it was as naughty as our mother affirmed it to be. She had never been there, as you know."

"Did you hope it would be naughty?"

"Perhaps I did. It was the year of the Great Exposition, 1900. Tom and I were tempted to wander from the high road. Don't repeat what I say to Eve. We popped into some of the side-shows." Mrs. Crampton lowered her voice. "We—we saw La Belle Fatma."

"Was she very beautiful?"

"I don't know. Tom bought two front seats. We entered a little theatre. . . . The curtain was down. . . . What happened next is, happily, a blur. We never saw La Belle Fatma. . . . Two young girls wriggled on. They didn't dance, they stood still and squirmed about. What they did with their *stomachs* was revolting. I touched Tom; I stood up; we left the theatre. As we did so, the audience cheered. Somebody yelled out 'Vive les Goddams!'"

"You saw the Danse du Ventre?"

"I didn't see it; I—I closed my eyes. Paris was too naughty for ME. Somebody told Tom that we ought to visit a show in Montmartre, put on, so he said, to entertain English curates. One, if I remember, was known as *Hell*. We had to leave that, thoroughly ashamed of ourselves. We wanted to go to Paris; we went; we left it without any wish to return. Now, I stress another point. A week of mad excitements might turn the head of a flighty girl. Our Eve is as sensible as we are. She will, I hope, enjoy herself, but I predict that she will be as glad to return to US as I was when I returned to London after my visit to Paris."

Eve accepted Betty's invitation. To her relief, Betty was not making a marriage of convenience. Her fiancé, some few years older than herself, *was* a Cornish squire, an M.F.H. He, at any rate, was head over heels in love with Betty, who "adored" him. The fly in Eve's ointment was listening to dissertations on Love's Young Dream. Eve restrained an impulse to say:

"If you go on stuffing Jack down my throat, I shall kill him or you." None the less, she realised for the first time in her life that love was a mighty conqueror, a wizard. A fairy wand had touched Betty, transforming her. Her one never-failing topic of talk, herself, became a glorification of her husband-to-be.

"We must find a Jack for you," she murmured.

Eve replied with spirit:

"I hope to find him on my own."

"Jack is so unselfish; he's made me less selfish. He swears he would die for me; and I believe he would."

The pair were married at St. Margaret's, Westminster. During the week she spent in Portman Square, Eve sat on the joy-wheel and attempted in vain to analyse her emotions, too dizzy perhaps to do so. At Tremayne Court she had met county folk not very different from the Hogbackers, albeit too absorbed in field sports which (as has been recorded) were denounced by Aunt Fanny as blood sports. In London, Eve met rising barristers, Guardsmen, men of letters, one or two Ministers of the Crown. Her vision of them was kaleidoscopic! The ordinary country miss might well have been intimidated. Eve was devoid of shyness and self-consciousness. She talked with the older men as she talked to Quentin Woodward and Colonel Wilmot. Mrs. Tremayne was very pleased with her, and went out of her way to do her husband's kinswoman a service. On the fourth day of the visit she took Eve aside.

"I have planned a little surprise for you. Lord Flamborough is dining with us. He will sit on my right, you will sit on his right. His wife can't come. Alaric Flamborough, swell though he is, is approachable. I asked him here to meet you, Eve, so you must rise to the occasion."

"It's frightfully exciting. Anyway, he'll talk to you."

"For a minute or two. After we have exchanged the usual tiresome courtesies I shall see to it that he turns to you."

"I ought to be scared stiff, but I'm not. It's sweet of you to do this for me. I—I can talk to him about Uncle Charlie."

"Clever girl!"

"You said that Lady Flamborough was not coming. Is she difficult?"

"Ah-ha! You pick your words. She's rather unapproachable. Her house is about the last of the feudal fortresses, surrounded by a barbwire entanglement."

"A duke's daughter couldn't be a snob."

"Oh, couldn't she! But she isn't a snob. In her position I

should do what she does, but my husband is an M.P. I have to entertain some funny people. A man dined with us last week wearing a white tie, a made-up tie, with a dinner-jacket. That sort of *bétise* would have wrecked the dinner for Diana Flam-borough. It simply couldn't happen to her. We're friendly enough, but she knows she might meet in my house people whom she would not allow to enter hers."

"I quite understand."

"Of course you do. Still——"

"Yes?"

"It doesn't pay nowadays to be too exclusive. Wear your prettiest frock tonight."

It is pleasant to record that, within five minutes of meeting her first cousin, once removed, Eve felt at ease with him. He called her—Eve! He suggested, later on, that she might call him Uncle Alaric. Obviously, Uncle Charlie had sung her praises. Eve nearly swooned when he said:

"Dear old Charles told me you lived in a charming cottage. What luck! I wish I lived in a cottage. I hate my London house. I never met your father nor his father. I wouldn't ask you to come to my dungeon. Could you come to us in Yorkshire, you and your mother?"

"I can't answer for Mum. Have you dungeons in your castle?"

"It's a sham castle, pseudo-Gothic, built at the beginning of last century. The old castle is a ruin. Are you keen on racing?"

"I've never been on a racecourse."

"Then I won't ask you for the Leger. I've two horses running. I won the Leger seven years ago. Do you play golf?"

"Not too badly."

"I've a nine-hole course in the park. Can you swim?"

"With one foot on the bottom."

"I have a swimming-pool."

He spoke so lightly, with such seeming indifference to his possessions, that Eve quite forgot that she was talking to a Knight of the Garter. He was, she thought, much easier to get on with than Evan Vallance.

She enjoyed her dinner.

She enjoyed Betty's wedding. Never once, during this eventful week, did she feel "out of it". She was told that her portrait would appear in *The Tatler*. Her host took her to the Royal Academy; she saw a polo game at Ranelagh; she went to two theatres, and the Covent Garden Opera House. . . .

At the reception, after the wedding, she was presented to Lady Flamborough. That great lady, who was diminutive in stature, said a few gracious words:

"You are Eve Golightly. Alaric hopes you can come to us in August. I'll write to your mother later on."

No compliments. Eve had a surfeit of them from others. Lying awake that night, too excited to sleep, she addressed herself solemnly:

"Eve Golightly, you are one of the family."

She returned to *Meadowsweet* to find her mother wearing an apron which belonged to Mrs. Tagg. Sybil's hands, she noticed, were grimy.

"Mum," she exclaimed, "have you been up the chimney?"

"You have come back, darling, earlier than I expected. Poor Mrs. Tagg is in a nursing home. Nothing serious . . . I'm doing the cooking."

"When did Mrs. Tagg go to the nursing home?"

"The day after you left. It was all arranged. There has been a minor operation. She'll be back in a fortnight."

"If I'd known this, I'd never have left you."

"I knew that. I heard the toot of your taxi, and I hadn't time to wash my hands. I've been scrubbing our pans."

"But where is Ellen?"

"It's her afternoon off. I wanted to get everything in order before you rolled up." She laughed. "I'm the only dirty piece in the cottage. You had a good time?"

"Too good a time," Eve replied cryptically.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### I

SYBIL INVITED EVE TO TELL HER EVERYTHING, WHICH WE MAY BE sure she did. Possibly the mother heard too much for peace of mind. Mrs. Tagg's absence had imposed hard work on Mrs. Golightly: she had overworked a not too strong body on Eve's account. She foresaw a disconcerting change, the too sharp contrast between joywheel and treadmill. On the day before Eve's return, Mrs. Wilmot had "dropped in" for a "chat". This well-to-do mistress of an ordered establishment had amused and irritated her hostess. She was of opinion that Mrs. Tagg had been

"inconsiderate". Sybil protested. The operation, slight though it was, could not be postponed. A grievance then obtruded itself. Mrs. Wilmot underpaid and overworked four maids. They bounced in and out of *The Towers* "inconsiderately"! None stayed more than a few months! Limpley wondered what Mrs. Wilmot disbursed in fees at the Guildford Registry Office. Her servants "lived in". Mrs. Tagg and Ellen, who "lived out", had remained faithful retainers for nearly five years. In 1929, the domestic servant problem was less acute than it is today, but already coming events were casting their shadows before. Wages had to be sweetened, which Mrs. Wilmot refused to do; pert minxes demanded longer hours "off"; Mrs. Wilmot's two daughters rebelled when the Colonel suggested that they, in emergencies, might lend a helping hand, pointing out that he worked hard in the garden, Mrs. Crampton "kept" her servants.

"You know, my dear, I think you have spoiled Mrs. Tagg. She is a good plain cook, I admit, but, I repeat, inconsiderate."

"In what way?"

"She leaves you at six . . .! She forces you to have high tea instead of dinner."

"Force is too harsh a word. She has to prepare a hot meal for her husband and put her children to bed."

"She has too many children."

"She wanted to leave me at five. She stays till six out of consideration for me."

"Very sweet of you to say that." She spoke acidly. "I hate to see you looking so tired. You have all my sympathy. My kitchenmaid left me two weeks ago. I cannot replace her. I have interviewed three little sluts; one interviewed me."

Sybil smiled.

"Interviewed you?"

"Yes. I asked myself, 'What are we coming to?' She had the impudence to present herself, all dolled-up, at the front door. She peacocked into the drawing-room, looked insolently at me and then—you will hardly believe this—stared—stared appraisingly at the furniture. It occurred to me that she might be mental, so I dealt compassionately with her. I asked to see her 'character'. She hadn't brought any credentials. She said insufferably: 'I walked from Guildford to see if this place would suit me. I'd like to look at the lady who cooks for you and take a squint at the kitchen.' "

"Did she interview your cook?"

"No. I lifted a finger; it trembled. I said, 'There's the



door.' She—she laughed and flounced out. A second later I heard the front door bang."

"This upset you terribly?"

"It did. May I ask if you are doing your own cooking?"

"I am. Fortunately I am alone."

"You should have sent for Eve."

Till now Sybil had been mildly amused. The imps of comedy saw to it that she should be irritated.

"How could I snatch a bridesmaid from a bride?"

The Colonel, too outspoken when his wife was not present, had said to Mrs. Crampton after the Cinderella dance: "I got beans from my Missus for suggesting that glorious pineapple punch. The old Serpent is in her. Gad! She can coil herself up! Then I'm reminded of a cobra poised for the deadly stroke. But I play mongoose with her." Sybil had laughed when Aunt Fanny repeated this. Its significance sizzled. Mrs. Wilmot, as soon as she mentioned Eve, had coiled. She was about to strike.

"You are spoiling Eve."

"Am I? Mr. Woodward told us a few Sundays ago that spoiling is not done by others. We spoil ourselves."

"Did he say that? I may have been dozing." Her tongue darted out; she compressed her thin lips. "Mr. Woodward, I grieve to add, is a twister."

Sybil compressed her lips. Why wasn't she a mongoose? She murmured coldly:

"He can give a twist to nonsense and make sense of it."

"Or t'other way about. I am unhappily, most unhappily, aware that I spoil my girls; the darlings take advantage of the love I lavish on them."

Sybil, a reader of Jane Austen, should have felt heartened. Mrs. Wilmot had lavished discipline on her girls. But she had never asked them to do what she held to be hand-soiling work. Like Eve, they had been day-boarders at *Highmount*, nicknamed by the boarders Bubble and Squeak. Let us admit that a neighbour, who had never been a friend, penetrated the chink in Sybil's armour. Criticism of her ewe lamb infuriated her. Serenity deserted her.

"I—I don't want to make excuses for myself. I do want to know in what way you think I've spoiled Eve?"

"I'm honest. I mind my own business. I make allowances for others . . . I do my duty."

A man shrinks from putting a gentlewoman's intimate thoughts into words. Had Mrs. Wilmot and Mrs. Golightly

been alone in Gilbert's *Palace of Truth*, the latter might have pulverised the former by exclaiming: "You har! You're a middlesome, self-righteous bitch." Instead, Sybil said frostily: "Perhaps I can try to mend my ways."

"Ah! We can all do that. Your Eve is most attractive, a charmer. She charms me. . . . My husband raves about her. . . . She has a joy in life denied to my girls. You are helping me. If we could mend ways as easily as we darn stockings our earthly pilgrimage would be like a stroll through paradise. I read that somewhere. It is not so much a matter of *mending* ways. We must walk in the ways where God has placed us."

"You may think that at this moment Eve is walking in the devil's ways?"

This was what Mrs. Wilmot was thinking, but she repudiated such thought-reading.

"Really I—I *am* taken aback. The wedding took place today. At Saint Margaret's, not, I think, in Westminster Abbey. I am sure that your daughter, dear, standing in God's house, was not thinking, as a daughter of Satan would, of her frock."

Sybil should have laughed. Irritation deepened. Why shouldn't a bridesmaid think of her frock? Humbug and hypocrisy were anathema.

"I shouldn't throw a pebble at her if she did. Eve could have spent a day in London; she was asked for a week. Tremayne ways are not our ways. I know that. I talked the invitation over with my sister. If your girls were invited to spend a week with an old schoolfellow who could give them the time of their lives, would you let them go?"

Had she put this question to the Colonel, he would have replied: "Let 'em go? What do *you* think? She'd speed 'em on the way, tell 'em to linger on as long as they could, and she'd talk of nothing else for a month of Sundays." Mrs. Wilmot replied quickly:

"I should not. You know my views on so-called smart society. I have never kept them to myself. What my mother called the Upper Crust is crumbling. She did not belong to it, nor do I."

According to Aunt Fanny, the Colonel had married a successful solicitor's daughter born and brought up, like the Veals, in South Kensington. . . .

Mrs. Wilmot returned to *The Towers*. Her conscience may

have pricked her. She had, quite unwittingly, upset a neighbour. It would be neighbourly to send to a poor creature doing her own cooking a few peaches, or a bunch of grapes. She sent, with her love, two fresh eggs.

## 2

After high tea, Eve talked for at least three hours of the week's "doings" and "undings".

"It beats me, Mum, that they can do so much. Practice, I suppose; at it all the time till two in the morning! I did over-eat myself. Even at breakfast, three silver dishes on the side-board dazzled me. No servants. We helped ourselves. I had to peep into every dish. . . . Mrs. Tremayne has breakfast in her room; the boys were there for only one night——"

"How did you get on with them?"

"They're still at Eton, too big for their boots. It bothers me that I can't talk to boys. One hopes to be Captain of the Boats, whatever that means. I think they do look on me as a poor relation. Where was I? I used to tell Aunt Fanny, when she bumbled about enough being as good as a feast, that I hoped to have the feast one day. I've had it. Maybe I feel a bit—gorged."

"I hope you do. But—do you feel gorged with—with too much entertainment?"

"Do I? I don't know. Uncle Quint will ask that. What shall I say to him?"

"Don't pretend with him. He'll find you out if you do."

"If he can explain me to myself, I shall kiss him. Honestly, I don't know where I am. Did you let me go to London for a whole blessed week to get on to myself?"

"Perhaps I did."

"Well, I feel so rummy. Are there two mes?"

"Possibly half a dozen."

"That's a poke in the eye. I am blinking at myself. Last year, before I left *Highmount*, Betty was in the thick of it. She wrote me long letters; I showed one or two to you. You made me laugh. You said that her activities made your back ache. I wondered, too, how she could stick it. You said something else——"

"Did I? I've forgotten."

"Yes; you said, with that sly little smile of yours, that the

idle rich had no leisure, busy all the time doing nothing worth doing."

Sybil frowned. She could hear Mrs. Wilmot admonishing her darlings.

"I was talking a year ago to a young girl, today I'm talking to a young woman. And I feel rummy, because listening to you carries me back twenty years. As I told your aunt, I'm terrified of imposing on you inhibitions imposed on me."

"But you never do, darling."

"For a reason you can't understand."

"Tell me."

"Inhibitions was a word I'd never heard. My mother spoke of prohibitions. Certain things were not done. But, you see, I knew they were done."

"What things?"

"Mrs. Wilmot could tell you——"

"She's such a humbug, a—a fusspot. She might get on to herself if she heard what Bubble and Squeak say about her. Let's hear what she'd babble."

Eve had inherited powers of mimicry from her mother, too discreet to indulge in the dangerous accomplishment. When Sybil spoke she had caught not only the inflections of a voice so different from her own, but the facial expression; lids drooping over eyes, upraised eyebrows, and a mouth which appeared to be moulded to express cliché.

"I think, children" (to Eve, Bubble and Squeak were present), "that a word in season will not be wasted on you. There are things which, if I may say so, are simply not done by self-respecting girls. You cannot be too guarded when you are alone with a young man; and I must warn you that middle-aged and even elderly men are now and again offenders against common decency. You may come to table with a too healthy appetite. Eat daintily. One glass of wine is enough. Curb your little tongues. Remain silent when any doubtful topic of talk crops up. Don't laugh or smile at a double-entendre. Snares are set to entrap schoolgirls. A discreet maid should try to look innocent. Innocence is respected. A young man is terrified of being labelled a cad. In my day, I blushed when a man spoke of babies yet unborn, of expectant mothers. Never listen to a story, however funny, which is off colour. Avoid flippancy. . . . That's enough."

Eve clapped her hands.

"Mum! I could hear Mrs. Wilmot speaking. You ought to have gone on the stage."

"I did."

"This is a staggerer. You're pulling my leg."

"All the world's a stage. I had to play the part of innocent when I wasn't innocent. I want you to be yourself."

"I'm not innocent. I know much more than you did when you were eighteen. Mrs. Wilmot is clever. Part of what she said just now is the goods. I can keep boys in order. You are much cleverer than she is. Boys are terrified of being labelled cads. Evan Vallance wants me to label him perfect gentleman. I label him imperfect ass. This is a splendid heart-to-heart. But I feel so dithered over the difference between my life here and the life Betty has led. At the moment she's stark, staring mad over love. She swears she'd live on a desert island with Jack. She's an awful funk on a horse, but she means to hunt just to please him. And he swears he'd give up hunting to please her. I do so wonder how you felt when you married Daddy. Could you have lived on a desert island with him?"

"I thought I could, but I knew that he couldn't live on a desert island with me. Anyway, for a time we did live the gay life in Green Street. Of course, he had his work in the City which steadied both of us. And then——" she paused.

"Please go on."

"I had to go slow on your account. Perhaps the happiest time of my life was the two months before you were born. Daddy devoted himself to me. And he hoped you would be a girl. He gave a reason which made me jealous."

"What was it?"

"He hoped that you would be like me and he said he'd love you to distraction if you were. But you are like him, not like me."

"Maybe . . . Mrs. Wilmot would blush . . . maybe you wanted me to be like him. Mim said something about pre-natal influence. Mrs. Tagg opened my eyes. Her eldest son is like that character in *Martin Chuzzlewit*. I've forgotten his name——"

"Mark Tapley?"

"Yes. Harry Stebbins is another Mark Tapley. And Mrs. Tagg says that when she was carrying him she hadn't a care in the world."

"Nor had I when I was carrying you. Mrs. Wilmot would rebuke us. She might say our talk was obstetrical. Now, darling, go to bed; and I shall come and tuck you up."

"Has anything struck your funny spot?"

"Yes. Mrs. Wilmot was talking yesterday about the difficulty of getting servants. At *The Towers*, every prospect pleases, but all young maids are vile. She predicts that the day will come, if it hasn't come already, when a kitchenmaid will expect her mistress to bring her an early cup of tea."

Eve ran laughing out of the parlour.

## 3

Next morning she brought a cup of tea to her mother. She had slipped out of bed an hour earlier than usual. She had put on a cap and apron. She mimicked Mrs. Tagg.

"If you please, Madam, now that our young lady is gallivantin' about lil ole Lunnnon town, I take it on meself to arsk you respecterfully to lie quiet a-bed. Me an' Ellun are ready ter oblige. The two of us can attend to everythink. I've some-think *extry* tasty for yer breakfus."

"Thank you, Mrs. Tagg, how kind and thoughtful you are. And I'm so glad to see you. I missed you dreadfully."

"It's not a joke, Mum," Eve replied in her own voice. "I have something for you, a surprise. Four lovely peaches."

"I'll drink my tea. Turn on the bath. I shall be down-stairs in half an hour."

## 4

In the memory of man, no Veal had been known to stultify himself or herself with over-indulgence in wishful thinking. Sybil was uplifted by two convictions: she had not spoiled Eve, and Eve, as yet, had not spoiled herself. She had returned from the week in Portman Square the same joyous creature; that had made *Meadowsweet* such a sanctuary to her mother. Nevertheless Sybil told herself that Eve was a crowd; as yet she had not found herself. She wished to excel at work and play. . . .

What about work?

According to Quentin, the only thing that made life worth living was congenial work. He made hay of the old woman's glimpse of heaven, "Where I can do nawthing for ever and ever." His belief in a future life, apart from Scriptural authority, was his conviction that the eternal spirit could more actively function freed from the trammels of the flesh. He cited Mozart (and other infant prodigies) whom he held to be inspired from

without. "We are here, all of us," he told the Limpley children, "to do the little we can, as best we can. We pass on to do better elsewhere." Eve remembered a talk he gave to the girls at *High-mountain*. He quoted the lines from *Paradise Lost* describing the meal which the first housewife prepared for the archangel Michael. This provoked disdainful comment from Betty, Bubble and Squeak. "Are we," they asked, "going to be skivvies if we climb the golden stairs? What rot to talk about angels enjoying a picnic!" Eve—who made the talk personal to herself—had replied not too tactfully, "You won't be skivvies, because you've never done a lick of work in your lives." The three young ladies would have booed Quentin (had they dared to do so) because he ended on a high note, "I have more respect for a scullerymaid who can wash dishes without smashing them than I have for a princess who rings the bell for a lackey to pick up her hanky."

Eve hastened to the Vicarage to tell Uncle Quint all about her jaunts and jollities. As she stood, slightly out of breath, in his den, he hailed her:

"Glad to see you, my vestal virgin."

"Why do you call me that?"

"Because you keep aglow the lamp in *Meadowsweet*."

"You mean Mum?"

"I do."

"That's the best compliment I've ever been paid."

"It's a fact," he said drily. "Long ago I told her she was the Lady with the Lamp. It might go out if you left her."

"Leave her?" She sat down. "Why should I leave her? Oh, I catch on . . . I used to gibber to you about earning my own living"—he nodded—"but I've found out where my place is—at home."

"Good for you. Still, if the fairy prince butted in——"

"He might," she laughed. "I hope he will, but if he did, and if I buzzed off with him, Mum would live with Aunt Fanny."

To her surprise he looked dour.

"Is that settled?" he asked.

"I—I hope it is. Why not?"

"So disconcerting to think of you as a woman. Your aunt gave your mother her cottage. Children have their moments. Did it seem odd to you that your aunt, living in a big house, did not ask her sister to live with her?"

"I forget. Yes; I—I think it did."

"It wasn't odd, Eve. Had Mrs. Crampton done so, it might have been a perilous experiment. Your aunt is the epitome of

commonsense. Somebody wrote about two sisters who shared a room in Edinburgh. Across the bare floor a white line was chalked. The sisters lived in that room with the line between them. They never spoke to each other."

Eve gasped.

"What an awful story!"

"Let's hope it was apocryphal. Your aunt had lived alone for many years. She wanted your mother to be near her, but not too near. This is conjecture. Your mother had to leave a house in London too big for her; she had been her own mistress. She is as sensible as your aunt. She must have known, although she couldn't tell you, that if she lived with an elder sister so set in her ways, she would have to play second fiddle."

"Thank you, Uncle Quentin. You know Mum better than I do. You look so solemn. . . . I'll tell you something—definitely. I've made up my mind. . . . I made it up last night. Betty Tremayne is twenty, too young to marry. I've sworn a swear; I won't marry till I'm twenty-five. So, you see, I'm all square with seven years to go."

"Cheers!" His face relaxed; his eyes twinkled. "Is it indiscreet to ask why you swore this swear last night?"

"Not a bit. I came back to find Mum fagged out. The lamp was only flickering. Of course I told her what a gorgeous time I'd had. Not till I got into bed did a funny sort of inspiration come to me. It was a hunch and a punch. It looks, yes, it looks as if one can't play about, making merry, without overworking somebody."

Quentin was at his desk. He picked up a note-book and scribbled a few lines in pencil. Eve apologised:

"I am thoughtless . . . I've interrupted you. . . . You're at work on a sermon. I'll pop in another time."

"Sit still. I wasn't at work on a sermon. What you've said may be a theme for a sermon."

"You mean there's something in what I said?"

"Far more than you think. Now I'm keen to hear about the merrymaking. Have at it."

## 5

Life ebbed and flowed tranquilly for Eve. She put on weight, she put off girlie-girlie trappings. She was amazed and delighted when Miss Poindexter offered her a small salary to



function as Second-in-Command of the playing-fields to Mim, whose joints were less supple. Poor Mim was threatened with arthritis. Eve promised to do what she could. Her duties were light. Twice a week, on half holidays, she coached the younger girls. She told her mother that they could worry along without Ellen, but could Ellen worry along without them? Aunt Fanny drew down her upper lip.

"Tch! Let's have no robbing of Peter to pay Paul. Ellen is a good faithful creature; she puts more than her back into her work. She has what is so rare in underlings—gratitude. I'm very pleased with you, Eve. You are a giver, not a getter. You are doing your bit at home and in the village. Do you find life humdrum?"

"I don't."

"Then carry on."

At the beginning of August, Sybil read with heart-flutterings a letter from Lady Flamborough:

*Dear Cousin,*

*Alaric and I hope that you and your jolly little daughter can come to us for at least a week on the day before the Twelfth. St. Grouse's Day is a festival which we keep reverentially. Three of the "guns" coming to us are young men. Eve can walk our moors if she likes. If she does, she must have stout stockings and brogues and wear tweeds. We shall do our best to entertain both of you. We shall be so disappointed if you can't come.*

*Yours hopefully,  
Diana Flamborough.*

Without saying a word to Eve, Sybil took this letter to *The Gables*. Pince-nez on nose, Aunt Fanny read it.

"Charming invitation, so—so bewilderingly informal. Our Eve must have captivated her cousins. Speaking offhand, I say this kind invitation must be accepted."

"I haven't the clothes——"

"MY affair. Not a word. I—I can see Eve at home with her own kin. It is not so easy to see you, dear, in the Seats of the Mighty."

"I could let her go without me——"

"You could. But—but——"

"Yes?"

"It would be a 'come-back' for YOU."

"Perhaps, but I funk it."

"Tch!"

"I do, Fanny. It wouldn't be a come-back, but a sort of back-somersault."

Mrs. Crampton removed her pince-nez and stared at the portrait above the mantelpiece.

"If my dear husband were alive, HE would urge you to attempt this—this back-somersault. YOU will land on your feet."

"I can't believe that Tom would pitchfork me out of a cottage into a castle."

"He would; he's smiling down on us."

The invitation was accepted.

Eve's wardrobe needed little replenishing. Sybil was provided with two simple evening frocks. Her daughter said reassuringly:

"You know, Mum, Cousin Diana is not 'smart'. Anyway, in the country it's smart not to be smart. Your tweeds are just right, because they don't look new. My golfing kit will be right for the moors; I have my brogues. Don't spend a farthing on me. It would have been so—so—what's the word?—so *churlish* to turn down such a nice invitation. Cheerio!"

Ten days later they travelled north. Let it be set down that Sybil achieved a "come-back". The warmth of her welcome put to flight misgivings. Aunt Fanny insisted on paying for first-class tickets. They left the train to find on the platform Cousin Alaric, with a tall footman in attendance. Outside the small station was a barrow. The luggage was placed on that. From the train, Sybil had her first glimpse of the castle. It stood in an undulating park, a deer park. Between the railway and the park flowed a river. Cousin Alaric kissed Eve, shook Sybil's hand and said:

"We walk down to the river, where I have my ferry. We walk through the lower gardens and in five minutes you will meet Diana. She would have come with me, but she's with our guests."

They were ferried across the river.

Passing through the lordly gardens their host said indifferently:

"Not too bad a saucer for the cup."

The cup, to Eve, when she saw it from the top terrace, was certainly a stately pile of golden stone. How many housemaids were needed to keep it in order? Would she lose her way in it? It was about four times as big as Tremayne Court. She could espy six towers.

"We have tea in the hall. You two don't look the least bit travel-stained. If you want to go to your rooms, we'll slip in at a side-entrance. Your things will be there in ten minutes."

He addressed Sybil, but Eve answered:

"Mum looks all right; and it doesn't matter how I look."

"You look," he replied, "as fresh as paint."

"Cousin Alaric, it isn't paint"

A minute later they passed through the front door, and found themselves in a lofty hall, oak-panelled, with full-length portraits on the walls. A long refectory table was at the farther end with a dozen guests seated at it.

It was a dramatic moment for Sybil as her hostess rose to receive her. One cold, appraising glance would have chilled her to the marrow, but the small lady approaching her was smiling and as friendly as her letter.

"So pleased to see you both. Come and sit by me. Eve will find two friends."

Eve was not kissed, but already she had seen Betty and her husband, Jack Politho, who had jumped up to greet her. Jack kissed her; Betty hugged her; all was well. . . .

No formal introductions! Cousin Alaric picked up a card and handed it to Sybil.

"List of our guests. Two of 'em are yet to come. Dinner is at half past eight."

He sauntered out of the hall. Eve found a chair next to Betty's; Sybil sat between Diana Flamborough and her father. For the first time in her life she shook hands with a duke who looked anything but ducal.

"Alaric," said his wife, "is the worst host in England. He has his tea by himself."

"It was very kind of him to meet us."

"You will sit next him at dinner. Will you have hot tea or iced? I hope your long journey was not too tiring. Do you play bridge?"

"I'm afraid I don't."

Her father chuckled.

"Nor do I, thank God! The damned game has wrecked country-house life. Di doesn't play; I'd disown her if she did, nor does Alaric. Half of the women cheat. There was that old——"

"Pip, dear, please——"

"I won't mention her name. She went crazy over bridge. We called her Ponte Vecchio. That was soon changed into Citta

Vecchia. She's gone where the bad 'uns go. But, mind you, she had the best cook in London. Your little girl is a sparkler, Mrs. Golightly. How old is she?"

"Eighteen."

"Were you eight when she was born?"

"I was nineteen."

At the farther end of the table, where the young people appeared to be having a jolly time, Eve's laughter rang out. Betty had smeared raspberry jam on a young fellow's cheeks. The Duke said, with another chuckle:

"You ought to be with the whelps."

Sybil's thoughts swooped to a house with only one tower. What would Mrs. Wilmot think if she were present? Would she give up the ghost? Would Fanny be pleased or displeased? How delicious the iced tea was!

"Pip——"

"Yes, Di?"

"We ought to offer Eve's mother an apple, but I think she'd prefer a nectarine."

Sybil accepted a nectarine. The Duke began to fill a pipe. Would he light it? He did. Two or three women were smoking cigarettes. Sybil thought: "Gracious! This isn't Flamborough Castle. It's Liberty Hall."

6

In a tapestried chamber, half an hour before dinner, Sybil told the maid who had unpacked her things that she was still able to dress herself. The maid withdrew. Eve came in.

"Aren't you glad we're here?"

"I am. I—I really am."

"You ought to be; you've made a hit."

"Who says so?"

"Jack Politho for one. He says that Alaric——"

"Darling! *Cousin* Alaric or *Uncle* Alaric——"

"He told me to call him Alaric. *Cousin* is *vieux jeu*. Well, Alaric paid us a whacking compliment. He never crosses the river to meet any guest unless it's a Royalty."

"He wished to put us at our ease."

"He'll take you in to dinner. That's the rule of the house. You and I are the only women who have never been here before. I do hope we'll come again. I made sure that everybody would

be stiff and starchy. We may dance after dinner. You must shake a toe with the rest of us. I've found out how many indoor servants there are; twenty-eight. It's funny . . . Servants are engaged to wait on servants. There's a groom of the chambers."

"Is there? What does he do?"

"Next to nothing; fusses with the note-paper, sees that the fires are burning, and ranks next to the butler. Beetle has invited me to stand in his butt tomorrow."

"Who is Beetle?"

"He sat next to me at tea. Jack introduced him as Beetle. I don't know his name. He called me Eve, so I called him Beetle."

Sybil was almost speechless. A cliché saved the situation, *At Rome, do as the Romans do*. She protested mildly.

"Aren't you exceeding the speed limit?"

"You see one must step up or step off. I couldn't be stand-offish with Beetle. He did tell me that we were cousins of sorts. He's in the Blues. Jack says he's a wonderful 'shot'."

"If you don't hurry up, we'll be late for dinner."

"I've one bit of exciting news for you. We were asked for a week. If we play up, we shall be asked to stay on for a fortnight."

She danced back to her own room.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### I

LIFE IN A GREAT COUNTRY HOUSE HAS BEEN DESCRIBED SO OFTEN that it is today familiar to millions. There is still (or there was in 1929) a splendid isolation which appals rather than expands the spirit. Life in palaces is too well ordered, too like a huge machine that appears to run itself. The workers are invisible after breakfast. Millions find it difficult to understand why the owners of lovely gardens leave them when they are in greatest beauty and spend three or four months in London. Search for the woman, as our cross-Channel friends admonish us to do. Let us admit that wives and daughters of county magnates lead lives duller than is generally supposed. Mothers have to find husbands for their daughters. Apart from this pious duty, the May-fair season appeals more to women than to men, particularly sportsmen. Lord Flamborough, for example, hated his London house; he loved his gardens, his home farm, his racehorses.

Also—which may raise an incredulous smile—he had affection for his many relations, most happy when he could collect them under his own roof-tree. His daughters were married; his sons, three of them, were serving their country; the eldest in the Corps Diplomatique, the other two in the Navy and Army. None of his children had kept sleep from his pillow. . . .

The house-party assembled in the Red Saloon.

Betty Politho, still the radiant bride, put Eve wise to a much relaxed procedure:

"The animals," she whispered, "don't march in to dinner two by two. Your Mum will be the guest of honour. No neighbours are coming, just ourselves, eighteen of us. You'll find your name on a card. If the Beetle is next to you, he'll make things hum——"

"Corny, I don't know who the Beetle is."

"I told you; a cousin as I am. His grandmother, or great-grandmother, was a sister of the Lady Augusta Golightly who married a Tremayne."

"But his name——"

"He's Lord Claud Beaumanoir, the third son of a marquess."

"Why isn't he called Beau with his red hair and freckles?"

A sonorous voice boomed out:

"Dinner is served."

The host left the Saloon with Sybil. He did not offer his arm. The young people came last. They traversed the hall not cleared for dancing. Betty was beside Eve.

"Aren't we going to dance?" Eve murmured.

"In the ballroom."

The dining-room was a lofty double-cube. Eve gasped when she entered it, because the dining-table was brilliantly illuminated with wax candles in candelabra. The rest of the room was dim. More family portraits hung on the walls. Tall footmen helped the guests to find their chairs, Chippendale chairs. Eve was amused. So obviously, the dinner-table, all that was on it, all that would be served on it, held the eye. . . .

The Beetle sat beside her.

"Bad luck," he whispered. "I can't stick the girl next me."

"Thanks."

"I mean t'other one. What a profile!"

"Shush-h-h."

"I shall talk to you, Eve; rum 'un you are. I honestly believe you'd sooner I said something sugary about your mother than about you."

"I would."

"Right! You're both darlings. This is going to be a poisonous meal."

"More thanks."

"No gormandising for me, Baby-face. Strictly rationed. Two glasses of pop, no port."

"You're on a diet? Convalescing?"

"Never fitter. But tomorrow I must hold straight. I'm here to kill grouse. Between ourselves it's the only thing I do well. And so little puts me off."

He picked up the menu.

"*Clear turtle*: a good starter. They do you top-hole in this little hovel. *Red mullet*, the woodcock of the sea. Tomorrow we shall have young grouse, not overcooked here."

"I've found out that we are distant cousins."

"We're going to cuddle up. Distant be damned."

He chattered on. Indeed, he paid Eve such attention that, later on, when the ladies left the men to drink their port, Betty took Eve aside.

"We all love the Beetle," she whispered, "because he makes love unblushingly to every pretty woman. He's the Prince of Petting Parties, a thruster. . . . Jack say he has 'hands'. If he begins petting you——"

Eve laughed.

"I shall get into a pet."

"That's the spirit. Paws off! He belongs to the *Nothing venture, nothing have Brigade*. I'm glad my Jack hasn't red hair."

Coffee was served in the hall. And here, on a table flanked by two complete suits of armour, Eve saw an imposing row of bottles; hard drinks, soft drinks, glasses large and small.

"Do the women drink after dinner?" she asked.

"They like a cooler after dancing."

When the men joined them, the house-party strolled through the Red Saloon into the ballroom. Here, the Groom of the Chambers stood near a magnificent gramophone. The Beetle, apparently, was Master of the Ceremonies. On a table near the gramophone were piles of records.

"Beetle," said his hostess.

"Heah, sah."

"No jazz, please. We should like to listen to Heddle Nash."

The only furniture in this resplendent room were some Louis XV settees and a grand piano. Beetle had engaged Eve for the first dance. She sat down with Jack Politho.

"Happy?" he asked.

"Deliriously."

"Make the most of it."

"You say that rather oddly. Is anything biting you?"

"Yes. After you left the dining-room, I found myself next the Duke."

"Did that upset you?"

"Why should it? He doesn't look or talk like a duke in a novel. Very human bird, as wise as an owl. He thinks this is coming to an end, on its last legs, if you know what I mean?"

"I don't quite."

Jack, so Eve reflected, was the right husband for a gad-about: a thought stolid and stodgy, but no fool, diffident of imposing his opinions on others.

"If you paid supertax you would. For a thousand years places like this have been run regardless of expense. Betty and I hope you will come to us and stay as long as you can. But I warn you, we're cheeseparing, cutting down all along the line. My father paid for the hounds out of his own pocket. Now it's a subscription pack. I can't afford to rear the pheasants he did. I don't whine. The Duke doesn't either, a good plucked 'un. But he knows more than I do, and he put the wind up me. And—and there it is. The old lad says he went in to bat on a better wicket."

A voice silenced him.

Eve listened entranced. At the end of the room her host was standing by himself. He stood aloof from his guests. Was he absorbed in his thoughts, or spellbound by the singer?

Heddle Nash was singing a lyric out of *The DuBarry*.

"If I am dreaming . . ."

The chatter died down. Eve closed her eyes. Presently the last line melted away.

"If I am dreaming, let me dream alone"

She was wearing the frock she had worn at Betty's wedding, cunningly altered. And she was feeling as she had felt when she walked up the aisle behind Betty between rows and rows of strangers, curiously alone, but excitingly aware of a change in herself. Was it possible to believe in reincarnation? Had she been in a former existence a maid of high degree, a little princess? Why wasn't she . . . rattled? Why didn't she feel "out of it"?



The Groom of the Chambers removed the record and replaced it with a waltz. Another voice rang out, the voice of the Beetle, informed by a transpontine accent.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, Swing pardners."

A moment later he and Eve were dancing. He said something; she made no reply.

"Has a belle," he asked, "been turned into a dumb-bell?"

"Beetle, I was still dreaming."

"Do you want to dream alone?"

"No. I have to pinch myself to make sure I'm awake. Cinderella must have done that when she danced with the Prince."

"The poor wench must have stopped dreaming when the clock struck twelve."

"Oh-h-h!"

"Has a beetle put a beetle-crusher on Cinderella's slipper?"

"No; you dance divinely. But it was a knock when you reminded me that my clock will strike twelve."

It is possible that a gay philanderer was touched. Jack Politho had told him that these new cousins lived in a tiny cottage, that Eve was now earning a small salary at her old school, that both her father and grandfather had been "dropped". The Beetle laughed and shrugged his shoulders, "Black sheep in every family," he said, to which Jack replied, "None in mine." Eve's ear, set close to her head, was close to his lips.

"Dear little heart," he whispered. "You have a week ahead of you before the clock strikes."

Everybody was dancing, nine couples on a polished floor spacious enough to give room for ninety. The Duke was dancing with his hostess, Sybil and her host exhibited to youthful eyes the rhythmical swing of the old-fashioned *trois-temps*.

At midnight Saint Grouse joined them and packed them off to bed.

## 2

The week sped by.

Betty and Eve tramped the heather with the "guns". In the middle of the day the other ladies joined them. A portable table was spread, a sumptuous luncheon was provided. The Duke astonished Eve when he protested:

"Never done when I was a boy, Missie, never! Not a change for the better. My old Pater carried his own nosebag and made

his guests do the same. Sandwiches which we cut ourselves at breakfast, bit o' cake, and a flask of whiskey, water from a burn. I'm here, glad to be here, because I have to let my grouse moor in Inverness and my forest. I miss my grandchildren."

"Why aren't they here?"

"Oh, well, the girls are entertaining their guests. The boys take their long leave at Christmas. So Di and Alaric are, for the moment, childless."

It was difficult to believe that the Duke had grown-up grandchildren. He must be, Eve thought, nearly seventy. He had married when he was four-and-twenty. Diana was his first child. A pony was provided for him; he could hold as straight as the Beetle; he could dance——!

On non-shooting days there was tennis or the swimming parade. After luncheon a fleet of cars assembled in the courtyard of the castle. Their owner inspected each, inviting his guests to take their choice and go where they pleased. On one wet afternoon the young people played poker for small stakes. Gambling was taboo. Meanwhile, Sybil smilingly refused to prolong her visit. She may have noticed that the Beetle was not philandering with Eve. Betty had said to her indiscreetly:

"The Beetle has got it, Mrs. Golightly, and serve him right, if you ask me. *He respects Eve*. He's fallen for her because she's different from all his girls; and he has about a dozen. Jack says she oughtn't to stand in his butt, because she puts his eye out. He wants to show off before her. I don't believe he's ever asked a girl to marry him. Everybody knows he can't support himself. If you'd been his mother, you'd have popped him into a marching regiment, not into the Blues."

"Don't worry, Betty. Eve is fancy free."

"I jolly well hope so, but you never know. The Beetle tried to fool about with me when I came out. Nothing doing. But if—if he had *respected* me, it might have turned my head."

No more was said.

Sybil might have been more uneasy had she overheard a brief talk between the friends. In a butt love-making is impossible, because a loader is present. Between drives, however, sauntering over the heather, Cupid gets busy.

On the third and last day, the Beetle was lamentably out of form. Being a good loser he made light of this. Outspoken always, he blurted out the truth after the last drive of the day was over. Eve and he were walking down an easy slope to a keeper's cottage where the family bus awaited them.

"I keep my eye on the bird, Eve, but my mind's eye is on you."

"Are you sure you have a mind?"

He grinned at her.

"I shall miss you most awfully. We've clicked. Would Mummie entrust her One-and-Only to me?"

Eve hoped that she was not blushing. Was this an up-to-date proposal? She held a tongue which had failed her. The Beetle went on:

"I shall nip down and cadge luncheon in your cottage. Dare I suggest luncheon with me at the Ritz Grill and a show?"

Eve hesitated.

"Of course, I'd love it, but I have an aunt: one of the Old Guard. I couldn't wangle it with her."

"I'd like to ask you a question. Have you ever loved anybody better than yourself?"

"Yes, definitely, yes."

"I knew it. Hell! I knew it."

"How?"

"The moment I met you I said to myself, 'This little lot is reserved, on show, not on the market.'"

"How I loathe that filthy word *market*. Have you any more questions to ask?"

"I don't see why I shouldn't. Who is he? If he's the right sort, I'd like to meet him."

"It isn't a he, you silly ass. The only person I love better than myself is my mother."

"You—you nasty slippery slink! Am I limping? May I lean on your arm? I'm down and out."

Eve said firmly:

"We *are* pals, Beetle. That's good enough for both of us."

"If you say so, it is so."

3

*Meadowsweet* looked like a doll's-house when Sybil and Eve returned to it. Mrs. Tagg welcomed them obsequiously. The name of her mistress had been in the "pipers". Figuratively, she curtsied.

"Did you leave 'is Lordship in good 'ealth, madam?"

Sybil raised her brows; Eve laughed, saying:

"Yes; and he sent his love to you, Mrs. Tagg."

"Lor'——! You do like yer lil jokes."

"It's true."

Eve had told the Head of the Family that Mrs. Tagg had been a never-failing friend. She went into details, much to his amusement. He had never met a "general"; he suggested "Field Marshal" as a fitting title, because Eve had described Mrs. Tagg "in action", brandishing her "gamp", which she carried in fair and foul weather. It was her baton. Uncle Alaric (Eve refused to call him Alaric) had said, "My compliments and love to this lady of the larder."

When does a young girl take notice of shafts not directed against herself? No male can hazard a conjecture. Probably, before she is herself assailed. Eve, for example, had been thrilled by Betty's wooing and wedding, sensible (as a Veal would be) that love, in its myriad manifestations, works a miracle. It had changed Betty, transformed a self-satisfied, self-engrossed chatterbox into a wife likely to become a good mother. . . .

The Beetle had said to Eve:

"I wonder why your Mum has not married again? She might be your elder sister."

Eve did some wondering. *Why had she not considered this possibility?* It had never occurred to her. With the one exception of Aunt Fanny, she had seen but little of the Veal relations after the move to *Meadowsweet*. Vaguely she was aware that second marriages were displeasing to Veals. Mrs. Crampton had spoken reverentially of an august Personage who had been faithful to her Consort. Mrs. Tagg held other views. She had cherished the hope that her young lady would return to the cottage betrothed (her word) to a lord. When Eve mentioned the Beetle by his right name and title, Mrs. Tagg made too sure that there had been "goings-on". A lively imagination soared higher. All Limpley knew that Mrs. Golightly was staying at Flamborough Castle. A mighty duke, a widower, the father of the Countess of Flamborough, was of the house-party. Mrs. Tagg was vouchsafed a vision of Sybil as a duchess, as Her Grace——! If the current fiction dear to her portrayed life faithfully, such a reward was overdue. . . .

Eve, within twenty-four hours of leaving the castle, marched into the kitchen prepared, but not permitted, to help with the mid-day meal.

"No, miss, 'twouldn't be seemly. If you'll sit down and 'ave a cosy chat with me, I shall be—*honoured*."

The "h" was emphasised. Eve laughed and sat down. She wanted to astonish an old friend.

"After dinner, on the first night, we danced. Who was the smartest woman in the room?"

"You, dear."

"Mum."

"Well, I never——! Excuse me, miss, but I 'appens to know that my dear lady bought two evenin' dresses in *Guildford*."

"She did. All the other frocks were short or shortish. Mum's frock, the black chiffon, touched the floor. I warned Mum. I told her she'd look terribly old-fashioned, but, you see, she's never worn a short evening frock. Before dinner, she had her little triumph. Did she wallow in it? I don't know, but I did. Lady Flamborough saw us come in and clapped her hands. She—she—SHE told Mum that she was the smartest woman present. . . ."

"Mercy me! 'Er Ladyship wouldn't tell a lie out o' politeness-like, would she?"

"She might, Mrs. Tagg. Her London dressmaker had told her that long evening frocks would be worn before next Christmas. Then her father got a laugh. . . ."

"'Is Grice, Miss?"

"Yes. He said that Mum was the only decently gowned woman in the room."

"That puts the lid on."

"I think Mum was pleased, but she didn't show it. After dinner she danced with the Duke."

This was confirmation strong of wishful thinking. Mrs. Tagg, greatly emboldened, glanced at the shut door. Ellen was upstairs.

"Hanythink, miss, might 'appen," she whispered.

"What do you mean?"

"Wot I've never 'ad the impudence to sy. The mistress is a prize——"

"And a—surprise. I believe she got a bigger kick out of this visit than I did."

"More'n likely."

Mrs Tagg wore an overall when at work. She held it to be demeaning to wear a cap. To prevent the possibility of a hair falling into the soup, she wore an ancient hat not too securely pinned on to greying and thinning locks. In moments of excitement she had a trick of maladjusting this headpiece. With the hat slightly on one side, she looked what she was: a comical Cockney piece, whose father (so she proudly told country folk) had been a bebuttoned costermonger.

"Anyway," Eve affirmed, "the darling looks younger."

Mrs. Tagg's left eyelid flickered as she fingered her hat.

"I'll sy it agine: Hanythink might 'appen."

"You're a very naughty friend. Don't deny it——! You've run away with yourself. . . . Of course you're a born match-maker. What woman isn't? Look here, if—if Mum married a duke, what would Limpley say?"

"Miss Eve, we'd 'ave another Maffickin' night."

"Well, I believe you would, bless you! But, seriously, Mum, as you must know, wouldn't marry the Prince of Wales if he asked her on bended knee."

"She'd be too old fur 'im. I sez this: I don't see 'er as a wife. I do see 'er cuddlin' a bibby. Why not? I 'ad my 'Arry when I was a slip of a gal, not eighteen, an' 'Arry *didn't* come——" She was about to add "afore 'is time." Hastily she amended this: "'E didn't come till me an' Mr. Stebbins settled down in Limpley. My last bibby I 'ad when I was on the wrong side o' forty."

What more might have been said was left unsaid because Ellen appeared. . . .

Eve was impressed. Her imagination took flight. Bubble (or was it Squeak?) had said long ago, "I don't want a husband mucking about in my house; I'd love a fat baby boy." The Wilmot girls had played with dolls when Eve, much younger, had given her babies to village children. Suppose, merely for self-enlightenment, that she had come back to the cottage engaged to the Beetle——? Suppose she married him or any other man——? Mum would be left—marooned; she couldn't see Mum living with Aunt Fanny. . . . Mists lifted. . . . Suddenly, with confounding visibility, she did see Mum at the Vicarage, Uncle Quentin's wife, his helpmate, and—and the mother of his child. . . .

Her reactions to such a possibility were a mixed grill, a bitter-sweet dish. Greatly to her credit, she eliminated self. Mum had no Victorian prejudices against second marriages. Mum had cited Mrs. Tagg, who, good soul, had been so wise as to take another dip into the lucky bag. Eve recalled what had escaped notice at the time: Uncle Quentin had rather a hard voice. Invariably it softened when he spoke of Mum. Why had he been so, so, yes, *paternal* to herself? Gentle and simple alike deplored their parson's celibacy. And Mum was so exactly the right wife for him. A glimpse of what had happened made her blink her eyes. Uncle Quentin might have asked Mum to marry him . . . she might have been tempted to say "Yes." Had she said "No"

because her ewe lamb might bleat a protest? "I'm going to have this out with Mum," Eve decided, "and the sooner it's over the sooner to sleep."

An opportunity came that night. Women, for the most part, set a shining example to men. They are so plastic to the Hand of the supreme Potter. High-tea after the banquets in Yorkshire would have made testy the genial Colonel Wilmot. Sybil and Eve were in good feather. They smiled at each other. Eve had a second helping of strawberry-jam, home-made. The late Alderman Crampton had been rebuked by his wife when, most thoughtlessly, he proffered the City of London's carefully considered verdict on a good dinner: "You sit," he said, "nine inches from the table. If, before the port circulates, you touch the table, you have—*dined*." Sybil and Eve washed up the tea-things and sat down in the "chintzy" parlour. Sybil quoted the late Sir Gorgius Midas immortalised by George du Maurier.

"Be it never so humble, Eve, there's no place like home."

"If we had six places," Eve replied, "we shouldn't have one home."

Sybil nodded, heartened to find her daughter in high spirits. She had spent the afternoon with Aunt Fanny; she had been admonished: "Prepare yourself, my dear, for *repinings*. Our little girl is not a woman yet. She will miss the splendours of Flamborough Castle. However, I predict that she, as before, will keep repinings to herself." Sybil was sure that Eve had no repinings.

"When I was with your aunt, you were at the Vicarage. I hope you didn't outstay your welcome."

"Outstay——? He ordered me to tell him everything."

"Did you?"

"Of course I did. Why—why do you look incredulous?"

"How you exaggerate! A girl can't tell a man everything."

"I told everything important."

Sybil sighed and held her tongue, provoking a riddle:

"What, darling, is the tremendous difference between your generation and mine?"

"Tell me."

"You think it bad form and bad manners to ask questions; we don't—we—do—not. There."

"It may be true. One of the reasons why I didn't ask questions when I was your age was my fear that they wouldn't be answered truthfully. When I was asked questions by my mother, too often I fibbed."

"I'll bet you did. Just now instead of asking me a natural question you sighed. Yes; it was on the tip of your tongue to ask me if I told Uncle Quentin everything about the Beetle. I did."

Sybil had endeared herself to the Head of the Family, because sly humour bubbled out of her.

"You did? If you're not fibbing, you had nothing thrilling to tell him."

"Top marks, Mum. How I wish I were as clever as you are. I did tell him that the Beetle kept off the grass. And he said that friendship was impossible between a young man and a young woman. 'Young' spiked my guns. I nearly told him that friendship was possible between him and you."

Sybil looked down a nose which was the most attractive feature on her face, a nose with a tiny tilt to it, a nose with super-sensitive nostrils. Her silence was Eve's opportunity. Ruthlessly, she gripped it.

"Maybe you think that middle-aged people can be real friends?"

"Do I? Love plays pranks even with old age. The Duke laughed over a funny case which wasn't funny. A friend of his, much older than himself, fell madly in love with a girl. The Duke swears that she fell in love with him. He was seventy when he married her. The marriage was a success."

"Cross your heart, please. Do *you* believe that friendship is possible between a man and a woman?"

"I d-don't."

"You've given yourself away. You've given Uncle Quentin away. Why didn't I find this out before? He's," she ticked him off on her fingers, "flinty, an abject slave to duty, and a funk-sticks."

Serenity abandoned Sybil. Her eyes flashed, her bosom heaved; she spoke angrily:

"Hold your tongue! How dare you?"

Eve laughed——!

"Oh, oh-h-h! I was inspired. What luck! If I'd praised him, I'd have got nowhere. He's the best man I've ever met; he's as unselfish as you are; and I believe I love him nearly as much as you do."

If an atomic bomb had crashed on the lawn outside, the effect on Sybil could not have been more cataclysmic. It shattered the reticences and inhibitions of a lifetime; it revealed herself to herself. Scarlet, quivering with emotions too long suppressed, she jumped up. So did Eve. But it was Eve who hurled herself



into her mother's arms, half laughing, half crying, but abrim with the soul-satisfying conviction that she had been inspired. . . .

## 4

None can set down inarticulate, hardly audible sounds. Eve crooned over a woman twice her age; Sybil clutched her as she might have clutched her mother.

*Amor vincit omnia.*

Love, in its purest essence, is as remote from sex as Uranus is from this insignificant planet. Had Sybil been in any condition to analyse her awakened emotions, she might have patted herself on the back. Years of never-failing devotion brought, suddenly and unexpectedly, a quite immeasurable reward. . . .

Eve assumed command. She led her mother to a small divan piled high with cushions, sat beside her and took her hand.

"Aren't you glad," she asked, "that I'm not afraid of asking questions? And I'm not afraid of calling myself a blind idiot. I ought to have guessed what happened two years ago. I just know it happened. Uncle Quentin asked you to marry him, didn't he?"

"Ye-e-es."

"Maybe you didn't love him then as you do now?"

"I d-d-didn't."

"Maybe you thought that he might come between you and me? Did you?"

"Eve, I can't tell you what I felt or thought. For one thing I was taken by surprise. I did know that he wanted me desperately. . . . But could I give him what every woman ought to give her man? I must be honest with you. In a sort of way you are not old enough to understand I—I shrank from making a marriage of convenience. I could help him in his work. I wanted to do that. I had to think of others. Your aunt has never been fair to him. And I had to think of you. You were sixteen, at a critical age. . . ."

"I do understand." Contrition made her add: "Did you think I was crazy or rude just now?"

"You have never been rude."

"I was rude when we came here. You made me write out fifty times 'I mustn't be rude or try to be funny with Aunt Frances.'"

"So I did."

"Have you forgotten what I wrote: 'I *must* be rude and try

to be funny with Aunt Frances.' And I'm rude to people I hate, like Mrs. Wilmot. If I hadn't been rude, if you hadn't started in to tell me off, we shouldn't have got anywhere. Mum, Uncle Quint still loves you desperately."

"How can you know that?"

"This afternoon he wasn't interested in me; he was mad keen to hear all I could tell him about you. So I piled on the agony. I told him you were It. I told him that Uncle Alaric laid himself out to please you, that he'd met you at the station and taken you in to dinner and danced with you. He—he squirmed. If I'd told him we had to take a back seat, it would have tickled him pink. He said gloomily: 'Your dear mother found herself at long last in her right setting.' Now, darlingest, you must ask him to dine——"

"To dine?"

"To dine at eight. We'll cook a corking dinner. You'll wear the black chiffon and your seed pearls. After dinner, I shall wash up. It will take me an hour. When I rejoin you, he, if he's half a man, will kiss me and tell me that I'm his chy—ild."

Sybil's serenity returned to her. She had listened, so Eve thought, perfunctorily to a marvellous plan, almost absent-mindedly. Then she said gently:

"It is my turn to ask you a question. Did Lord Claud propose to you?"

"Lord Claud——! Can I let the Beetle down? Mum," she spoke solemnly, "I must be as honest as you are. I—I saved him from making fools of both of us. He made a pass at me as a sop to his vanity."

"You're an astonishing girl. Sop to his vanity?"

"He couldn't hit the birds in the beak; so he hoped to down me. He was in full spate, but I dried him up. He didn't propose. We parted the best of pals. Betty says that Lord Claud Beaumanoir—what a mouthful!—will be led to the altar by some Miss Ganderbilt. I hope I shall be asked to the wedding."

"I'm immensely relieved," Sybil said, pressing Eve's hand. "I'd sooner see you married to Evan Vallance than to him."

"I may have to dry Evan up."

They went to bed.

In bed, Eve wriggled restlessly beneath one sheet. The night was oppressively warm. The window overlooking the lawn

was wide open. After undressing Eve spent a few minutes at it. The moon was waning in a cloudless sapphire sky. The village lay beneath her, a soft blur. Here and there she could discern what appeared to be glow-worms, gleams of steady light from not more than half a dozen cottages. If Mum married, she would sell *Meadowsweet*. . . . The three of them would live in the Vicarage, not an alluring prospect. Eve muttered to herself: "Miss Gooseberry Golightly." Likely as not Aunt Fanny would suggest removing the gooseberry. Eve frowned and then laughed. The ancient family joke obtruded itself. Her mother—she hadn't a doubt of it—was about to gather apples, Cox's Pippins. Betty had picked her apples, so had Mrs. Tagg. . . . At *Highmount* the family joke had amused Mim. Apples, so she declared, were within reach of any girl. If a little fool coveted hothouse fruits, disappointment might be her portion. . . . Apples to giggling girls suggested pears differently spelt. Mum and Uncle Quint were a pair.

She heard a train rumble by in the distance.

Strange to realise that thousands worked when others slept. Did they grow accustomed to that? Did an owl envy a swallow? Did nightjars croak because they hated the night? Did a night-watchman in an empty building curse his lot? Uncle Quint had said that work justified and illumined life if it were congenial work. What a colossal "If"!

A wandering zephyr kissed her hot cheek. She shivered, and slipped into bed. Apples, for the months ahead, would be a synonym for congenial work. She might have to go "on her own".

Presently she fell asleep, smiling.

## CHAPTER NINE

### I

LATE IN OCTOBER SYBIL AND QUENTIN WERE MARRIED.

The *Guildford Advertiser* may be cited:

Last Tuesday, in Limpley Old Church (which was packed to capacity), the Rev. Quentin Woodward, popular Vicar of the parish, was married to Mrs. Golightly of *Meadowsweet*; the prettiest cottage, if we may say so, within a five-mile radius of Guildford. The happy pair were joined together by a kinsman of the bridegroom, the Ven. Archdeacon of Rhys. The Earl of Flamborough, K.G., gave away his kinswoman. A notable

wedding! Outstanding, inasmuch as the magnificent bouquet carried by the bride was not, as is customary, the gift of the bridegroom, but a floral tribute from the villagers to a "friend" who, ever since her arrival in Limpley a few years ago, has ministered to her humbler neighbours. Indeed, if we are credibly informed, the Vicar has spoken of her as the Lady with the Lamp. After the ceremony, when the bride walked down the aisle beside her husband, many young mothers held up their babies as if silently demanding her benedictions.

The bride was simply gowned in lavender grey with hose to tone. Her daughter, Miss Eve Golightly, the Maid of Honour, must have refused to outshine her mother. Her frock was of the simplest also, but delightfully becoming. Both "confections" were designed and made in Guildford. The Vicar's best man was his brother, Commander Woodward, R.N. A reception was held at *The Gables*, the residence of Mrs. Crampton, the bride's sister. The Earl of Flamborough was her guest.

An old, now obsolete, ritual was amusingly resurrected at the request of Miss Golightly. Across the lych-gate entrance a white satin riband was stretched, held taut by young hands. Progress was barred to the laughing pair till largesse had been scattered.

A fortnight's honeymoon at Bournemouth will be, we venture to predict, "linked sweetness long drawn out".

"*Ave, non vale!*"

2

So far as Sybil was concerned, her path from cottage to altar may be described as smooth. She anticipated protest from Aunt Fanny. The Socialists were now in power. The Hog's Back was bristling. Colonel Wilmot became morose. Mrs. Wilmot looked—so Eve affirmed—as if she were on a tumbril *en route* for the guillotine. Lady Olive Vallance's chin disappeared into a jabot of old lace. She whispered to Aunt Fanny: "For the first time in my life I cannot say: 'God's will be done.' This is the end of peace on earth."

Eve had suggested that she might break the news of the engagement to Aunt Fanny:

"I'll do the dirty work, Mum, it will do me good to do it."

"Dirty work—? Darling, you simply must break yourself of this habit of exaggeration. And you are too slangy. That doesn't bother me, but it grieves Aunt Fanny."

"You're right. Mim says I'm a back-chatterbox. Tit for tat . . . I take back 'dirty'. All the same, it soils my mind when poor Aunt Fanny washes her linen before me. I mean the linen she wore in ancient days which she wears still. Her 'down' on the best man in the world is—yes, it is—unclean. I've often wondered if— Shush-h-h!"

She laid a finger on her lip.

"Say it."

"She talks to me about Prebendary Leigh romantically. His wife died about the time Uncle Tom died. If the old lad had been more enterprising he might have been another uncle."

"Stranger things have happened."

"Anyway, to Auntie the Prebendary is still alive. She compares him with Uncle Quint. I want to spare you a hateful quarter of an hour. To me it's an apple."

"An apple?"

"It's a sitter . . . a cert . . . that I can smooth down Aunt Fanny quicker than you can. And if I do, what a pippin for little Eve!"

Sybil—can we blame her?—exercised Veal sense. Her sister had a temper. Aunt Fanny would say to a sister what she might withhold from a niece whom she loved. She would control her temper. She might surrender unconditionally. . . .

"I wish I were as brave as you are," she murmured. "I lost my temper when you spoke ill of Quentin. I might lose it with your aunt. She may think me a coward. I am . . . I—I consent to your seeing her." She smiled faintly. "Best of luck."

### 3

Eve found Mrs. Crampton out of humour, "not at home" to visitors because she was wheezing, being subject now and again to bronchial attacks. However, she had faith in the local general practitioner, Dr. Bishop, who for more than a decade had talked of retiring from active practice. He was *persona gratissima* to Mrs. Crampton because he made light of her passing indispositions. Eve was of opinion that Dr. Bishop ought to have retired about the time when King George ascended the throne.

"Glad to see you, child. Sit you down. You must do the talking. My pipes are none too clear."

"Milly told me you weren't seeing anybody; as I'm a nobody she let me pass."

Mrs. Crampton's front door was kept locked. Even a nobody dared not march into *The Gables* unannounced. Before entering the drawing-room, Eve had taken herself to task. "'I mustn't be rude or try to be funny.' No slang." Aunt Fanny was in an easy-chair at eleven in the morning! A wood-fire was smouldering. A Veal was incapable of being sorry for herself, but her face, so Eve noted, was a bad colour.

"Ought you to be in bed?" Eve asked.

"Ought to be in my coffin, I dare say. Can't get quit of a tiresome and tiring cough. How's your mother?"

"Mum is looking happier than I've ever seen her."

Speaking slowly and with wheezing punctuations, Mrs. Crampton said impressively:

"Why? You, child, are too modest to guess. She is happy because she is pleased with you; and so am I. Wait!"

She took from a small silver box beside her a lozenge, which in half a minute worked a temporary miracle. Then she went on:

"That visit to Flamborough Castle! Your mother was on the point of declining a charming invitation. She feared, as well she might, that so dazzling a change would upset YOU. But I, Miss Eve, refused to share these apprehensions. I was so sure that your little head would not be turned. And it wasn't. Your mother is happy because you are happy and, thank God, *contented*."

"You mustn't talk, Aunt Fanny. Mum is ever so happy for another reason. She wanted to tell you herself, but I—I—was it selfish of me?—wanted to tell you first because I knew her wonderful news would make you nearly as happy as she is."

Oh, Eve—Eve! Is a lie from a maid's lips worth even a golden apple from the Hesperides?

"Wonderful news?"

"The best."

"I can guess. Yes, I foresaw what obviously has happened. General Golightly met you at Bournemouth. You dined with him. You never saw him again, but he left you one thousand pounds. Your mother spent a full week with the Head of your father's family, a very rich man. Did you tell him you lived in a cottage?"

"Yes, but——"

"There are no 'buts'. Suitable provision has been made, too tardily, for your father's widow."

"No."

"I'm disappointed."

"You might make another guess."

"One is enough. Still—I believe I have it. You say you have wonderful news; and you have come here to tell it, sure that it will make a cross old woman happy. Something happened when you were away. . . . That doesn't surprise me. . . . Why wasn't I told about it? Because a self-respecting little maid keeps hopes to herself. You are *engaged*, perhaps to the

young gentleman you call the Beetle? Yes, yes, yes, you are. And I *am* happy. Kiss me."

Eve's considered plans for picking apples crumbled. She was, incontestably, clever beyond her years, and not versed in duplicity.

"I'm not engaged, Aunt Fanny, but Mum is."

"What? Can I believe my ears? Your mother *engaged*? To whom? I—I have it. I repeat: nothing surprises ME. Your Uncle Tom, when your mother was sixteen, said that she might marry anybody. At the castle she met one man older than herself. He paid her attention. You told me so. More, much more, she blushed when I repeated to her what you had said. She has engaged herself to the Duke of Monteith."

"The Duke has grown-up grandchildren," Eve faltered.

"Tch! Your news is indeed wonderful. It has stopped my wheezing."

"Auntie, Mum is engaged to a better man than the Duke. To a man whom everybody loves and respects—Mr. Woodward."

A violent fit of coughing assailed Mrs. Crampton. By God's grace it made speech impossible. Intuition had served Sybil faithfully. Her sister might have a temper, but she would refuse to display it before her niece. When Eve picked up the lozenge box, Aunt Fanny made a gesture, closed her eyes, stopped coughing and lay back in her chair.

"What a hash I've made of it," Eve thought miserably. Tears filled her eyes and trickled unheeded down her cheeks. Her aunt opened her eyes, stared bleakly for a moment at HER child, and spoke kindly.

"Why are you crying?"

If youth but knew. . . . And what, pray—in the name of the Sphinx—can age tell youth? One thing of paramount importance. Let truth prevail.

Eve realized that she was crying. She realized, as instantly, that she had been a fool to attempt a mission beyond her powers. Truth burst out of her.

"I—I knew you'd go bang off the deep end."

Without any wheezing, in a voice informed with incredulity, Mrs. Crampton repeated Eve's words.

"You knew that I'd go bang off the deep end?"

"'Course I did. That's why I'm here. I can stick it better than Mum can. And I felt that if she came here and then came back looking unhappy, I—I——"

"Go on."

"Should hate you."

"Hate ME?"

"How can one help one's loves and hates? I—I love you; you know I do, but you have such a down on Uncle Quint, who is a darling. It began when he started that Young People's Club in the Vicarage; and I don't mind telling you, even YOU, that it has done more to bring people together in Limpley than everything Prebendary Leigh did. You think," she went on vehemently, "that he's a Socialist. He isn't. He hates politics. He says that politics tear people apart. Mr. Woodward," vehemence went out of her voice, "proposed to Mum two years ago. She refused him. Why? Partly because I needed her attention, which I did; partly, principally I believe, because she knew that you would be beastly; and—and you had done so much for her. Aunt Frances"—she stood up—"I brought on that dreadful fit of coughing. I—I was a b-b-blithering idiot to come here. Heaven knows what I shall tell Mum when I get home."

"Sit down! Sit down!"

Eve obeyed, covering her face with quivering hands.

"You lied to me just now. You said that your wonderful news would make me happy and you knew all the time that I—I should go off, as you put it, the deep end?"

"Yes, Auntie, I lied."

"You—you lied joyously. I forgive you. Dry your eyes. Somebody has said that the price of lies constrains liars to go on lying, or words to that effect. When you meet your mother you must tell, joyously again, another lie."

She paused. Her face was stern, her lips were compressed.

"Look at me."

Eve's hands dropped to her lap.

"What do you see?" asked Mrs. Crampton.

Quick though her wits were, Eve had failed to guess what lie she was enjoined to tell her mother. She supposed, being sadly befuddled, that she might be ordered to return home without apples, having funkcd at the last moment to impart the news.

"I see you."

"Do you? You see a woman who is other than the woman she was five minutes ago. You have abased me. Not the first child to do that. When you say your prayers tonight, you can thank God that He sent you to ME. Had your mother come, I might have said words I should have regretted for the rest of my life. You have torn a cataract from old eyes which no longer see as clearly as they did. Mr. Woodward is a good man, your



mother is a good woman. I have let my mind dwell upon slight defects in great qualities. I admit, with regret, that I have allowed others to influence ME. No names. It is true; politics tear us apart. Enough. You can bathe your face in my bedroom. You will find eau-de-Cologne on my dressing-table. You will not find what, no doubt, all you girls carry in your hand-bag. I wish to inspect you before you leave my house. Your mother must feel happy when she sees you. Not a word of what has passed, and is past, between US. The lie you will tell may be placed by the Recording Angel to MY account. Let us visualise the scene. Will your mother meet you at the wicket-gate? No, no. You will find her in the parlour. She won't look happy; she may be slightly breathless. When you lied to me, you didn't look at me. When you lie to her, I see you in her arms, with your lips close to her ear. You will whisper the lie." Her old eyes twinkled. "The Recording Angel may not hear you. I am an indifferent liar. You must repeat the lie you told me. Whisper. 'Mum, Auntie is nearly as happy over this as you are.'"

"Auntie," her laugh tinkled, "I can do it. What a brain-wave!"

"Shall we say, child, that after all it will be only half a lie——"

"You mean——?"

"Much that I am unable to say. Between ourselves, before the banns are published, I shall have purged myself of petty and unreasonable prejudices."

Aunt and niece embraced.

#### 4

Age and youth had overlooked what was bound to happen. Sybil was on tenterhooks when Eve found her in the parlour. Eve hugged her and whispered the lie. . . .

"I c-can't believe it, darling."

"You must. I've repeated word for word what Auntie told me to say to you."

"I feel so ashamed of myself. Your Uncle Tom spoke of his wife as a woman nobly planned. He was right. May God forgive my hard thoughts of her. Details, please. How did you find her?"

"Coughing and wheezing. She stopped both when I told her the wonderful news. I—I mean it made her cough, and then in

a jiffy she stopped coughing. She says that Uncle Quint is a good man and that you are a good woman."

"Eve, are you telling me the truth?"

"Yes."

"How did you begin?"

"She asked after you; and I said that you were looking happier than I had ever seen you."

"You were inspired."

"I was."

Sybil had to take two turns up and down the room before she spoke.

"Eve, I owe this to you. I don't fool myself. Your aunt never saw Quentin as we see him. Mrs. Wilmot ran him down to every Hogbacker. She ran him down to me. I exaggerated your aunt's little crotchets. Her judgments are sound at core"

"All right. I exaggerated what you call her crotchets."

"Then you expected a—a——"

"Rumpus? I did."

"Then you saved the situation. You—you smoothed things down. What did you say about apples? You hoped to bring back an apple and you have. This has been a triumph for you. Now I must ring up Quentin. I promised to do so the moment you got back. He's been, and still is, as nervous as I was a minute ago. Have you any message for him?"

"I certainly have. Tell him, with my love, to take the moth-balls out of his swallow-tail coat. Within three days there will be a celebration at *The Gables*."

There was.

5

Aunt Fanny reaped a rich reward. When the engagement was announced in the *Morning Post*, the Head of the Family asked if he might give the bride away. There was no spare room fit for such a guest in the cottage. Eve suggested to her aunt that her spare room was all that it should be. Mrs. Crampton replied coldly:

"I have not the honour of knowing his lordship."

"He's so easy to get on with. He would only stop one night. I'll fix it up. He said in his letter to Mum that Cousin Diana wanted to weigh in too, but she couldn't. If you saw her engagement book—— She spends half her time opening bazaars and what not. Such rot to talk of the idle rich."

"Stop chattering. I must give this careful thought."

Eve knew that her aunt was pleased. Thought would ripen into acquiescence. Mrs. Wilmot would be confounded. . . .

On the afternoon before the wedding, Mrs. Crampton's ancient brougham rolled into Guildford with Eve alone inside it. Uncle Alaric had met her; she must meet him. By this time it had been arranged that he should give away the bride, his kindly suggestion.

Sitting beside Eve, he said pleasantly:

"If your mother is as happy as you look, all is very well." Eve reassured him.

"Mum," she went on, "has changed places with me. I'm mothering her."

"I'm sure you are. Tell me, Mamma, your plans. Middle-aged women like you dread dislocations, and mothers-in-law are accused, unjustly, I think, of being a nuisance. Are you going to live with the young people at the Vicarage?"

The sympathy in his quiet voice loosened a tongue that wagged with or without provocation. She slipped her hand under his arm.

"Oh-h! You are a dear. . . . I am just a wee bit rattled. And, of course, you are the Head of the Family. I believe I can say to you what I can't say to my own aunt."

Excitedly, girlishly, talking as she might have talked to Betty Politho, she spun her yarn. She couldn't live alone in the cottage; she had entreated her mother not to sell it; the young people wanted her to live with them; Aunt Frances wanted her to live at *The Gables*; Miss Poindexter was quite eager to take her on as permanent Games Mistress. . . .

"Good."

"Good—Uncle Alaric? I feel like a donkey with three bundles of hay dangling in front of my nose."

"I mean that you, Mamma, are in demand. As a rule I'm sorry for mothers when some thoughtless fellow robs them of an only child. They are at a loose end."

"I was a fool to tell you that I was mothering Mum. I'm terribly serious. Do you remember how you laughed when I told you I was out to gather—apples?"

"We're all out to do that."

"Naturally I want to do what's best for myself, but I have to consider others."

He held his tongue, thinking of dislocations. Could he advise his kinswoman? Could he smooth down a tempestuous

petticoat? Could he, in fine, whirl himself into houses he had never entered and never seen? His trainer, his agents, his wife, his children accused him, not unfairly, of withholding advice. To such an indictment he replied that he was chary of giving advice because, strangely enough, it was too hastily taken, imposing dire responsibilities.

After a pause he said slowly:

"I coveted a big apple when I was at Eton. I wanted to win the Derby. I have never done it. It was and is—out of reach. Why are you so keen to keep the cottage?"

"Because I've a hunch that I may live in it some day."

He attempted to assimilate this. His wife had urged him to attend Sybil's wedding. "We must do something for Eve," she had said. "A parson's wife can't take her about. I'll do it, if you can coax her to come to us next season. Such an attractive little creature!" Without more urging, he had said curtly: "We'll give her a chance if—if she jumps at it."

He muttered tentatively:

"Not a big apple."

"It's a golden pippin to me."

"I—I," he spoke incisively, "can dangle a fourth bundle of hay. For our sins we go to London in May and stay there till the end of July. My wife and I can offer you not exactly a home but a jumping-off place. What say you?"

"I haven't quite got it. Are you asking me to stay with you in London for three months?"

"We are. Would it be durance vile for you?"

"It would be too marvellous. It—it——" Words failed her, so she pressed his arm affectionately, wondering if she dared kiss him. They were out of Guildford and nearing Limply.

"You must talk it over with your mother."

"I feel like the trout who was trained to live on land and was put back into water. He drowned."

"You won't drown. Now, Eve, I want advice from you. I've no wedding present for your mother. Is there any apple she covets? A fur coat? A small runabout car?"

"Mr. Woodward has a car. You wouldn't be found dead in it. A fur coat would be too lovely, but too—too swanky. I do know what you could give them. Mum has no silver, nor has he. They have electro. And it's really more difficult to keep electro polished than silver. Don't I know that? Aunt Frances is giving a cheque. Mum told me that she might squander some of it on table silver."

"She used the word 'squander'?" Eve nodded. "Has your mother a silver tea-service? She hasn't. She'll find one when she returns from her honeymoon."

Eve withdrew her hand from his arm, took his ungloved hand and kissed it.

## 6

Uncle Alaric stayed two nights at *The Gables*. On the first night there was a dinner-party. Mrs. Crampton's Milly swelled like the fat boy in *Pickwick* because an out-of-a-job butler from Guildford served under her. Eve had told her aunt that, long ago, Lady Olive Vallance had known Lord Flamborough, so she was invited to renew acquaintance with him. Quentin brought his brother. Eight persons in all, including Evan.

The success of this grand dinner, so Mrs. Crampton reflected afterwards, was due to Commander Woodward. He told rollicking stories and roared with laughter at his own well-salted jokes. Nothing intimidates Britannia's sons. Eve was torn in twain by conflicting emotions. She told herself that she hadn't lost her mother; she had gained a father. Both Sybil and Quentin took for granted that she would live with them. She would stay at *The Gables* whilst they were at Bournemouth. Eve had barely time to dress for dinner. Aunt Fanny had urged her not to leave her alone with a distinguished guest. On arrival tea was ready for the three. Mrs. Crampton, who courted sleep by repeating to herself the *Lays of Ancient Rome*, had said almost dramatically: "Child, you must keep the bridge with ME." Eve obeyed cheerfully enough, assuring her aunt that real swells put everybody at their ease. Discreetly she made no mention of the invitation to spend three months at Flamborough House. Such glad tidings could not be kept from her mother. They bubbled out of her as soon as she returned to *Meadowsweet*.

"You accepted?"

"How could I till I'd talked it over with you?"

"Thank you. If we do talk it over, we shall be late for dinner. We'll talk it over and out tomorrow."

"Tomorrow is your wedding-day——"

"I hadn't forgotten that. We could talk it over tonight, but it might keep both of us awake."

At the dinner Eve was obliged to listen to Evan, a dismal Jimmy. He talked of his apples. When Eve urged him to talk of the morrow, he said lugubriously: "I can't get a kick out of a

wedding," which provoked a riposte from Eve: "Promise me you won't cry at your own funeral." Evan, to her dismay, was an apple unripe for the picking. Trying to appear at his best, actually at his worst, he made "goo-goo" eyes at her. Somehow he exacted attention, as most bores do. And she was unable to wean her thoughts from Flamborough House.

The dinner came to an end. Evan, to his eternal disgrace, allowed a Knight of the Garter to open the door for the ladies when they left the dining-room. . . .

Seated on the hard sofa in the drawing-room, Lady Olive beckoned to Eve, patting the empty place beside her. The sisters were on the hearthrug, warming toes chilled by October.

"You look so sweet tonight," murmured Lady Olive. "And I wasn't the only person to think so."

This allusion to a beloved son was not wasted on Eve. Never had Lady Olive cooed to her. Rather the contrary. Since Eve's coming-out Evan's anaemic mother had been cold as Greenland's icy mountains. Why had she changed into a coral strand? Miss 1929 was less worldly-wise than Miss 1946, but Eve giggled inwardly. A wizard had waved his wand. Eve, to Lady Olive, was no longer the daughter of an impoverished widow but intimately linked with a Personage. Had this fond mother known that a country maid had been invited to spend a London season in the heart of Mayfair she might have contemplated the giving of another Cinderella dance with Evan as prince.

"I know whom you mean," replied an unblushing fibber. "I met him at the station, and in Auntie's old brougham, he paid me such nice old-fashioned compliments."

Lady Olive was impressed.

"I am not surprised. But there was somebody else. Evan and I both noticed a change in you when you returned from your visit to your aunt's guest."

"A change. I—I wasn't conscious of any change."

"You looked, shall I say—*exaltée*?"

"Lady Olive—!"

"You dear thing. I assure you we detected no airs and graces which might have been expected from the Wilmot girls. No, no. But the change to—to a *milieu* so different from what is almost Suburbia had given you a most engaging distinction. You take after your father's family which is your family."

Eve had no answer ready. She hoped that the men would join them soon. Milly entered with the coffee.

"The gentlemen, Madam," she said to Aunt Fanny, "are drinking their coffee in the dining-room, as you directed."

"I would sooner hear, Milly, that they are enjoying their port."

"The port," Eve explained to Lady Olive, who bought what wine she needed in Guildford, "was laid down by my Uncle Tom."

Mrs. Crampton, to her relief, took her place. Eve talked to Sybil. Lady Olive was slightly deaf.

"Why did Aunt Fanny ask those stiffs?"

"To give pleasure to Lady Olive."

"Yes, why didn't I think of that? She crooned over me just because Uncle Alaric is here. Can we sneak off soon?"

"Reasonably soon. Why?"

"Because I can't wait till tomorrow. To be or not to be is gnawing at me. In that fusty old brougham I had the big thrill of my life."

"You want to go?"

"I do. Not, Mum, to race about to parties. I want to *meet* people; all sorts—writers, painters, big men who are making history."

Sybil could come to a decision quickly.

"We needn't hurry away. If you feel like that, you shall go."

She sighed.

"I won't go, if you want me at the Vicarage. I wouldn't have gone last August, leaving you alone. It made everything right your coming with me. Why did you sigh?"

"Did I? I was whirled back twenty years. If—if Daddy had known his cousin, if I had gone with him to Flamborough, our lives might have been so different."

"Heavens! You mustn't be sad tonight, darling. Then it's really settled?"

"It is."

"How marvellous!"

"You use that word too often. One little question: are you sure that you can paddle your own canoe in waters so unknown to you?"

"I am . . . definitely I am. Last August I had the surprise of my life. It's ever so much easier to get on with real swells. They put one at one's ease at once. I didn't feel out of it talking to the Duke. I did feel out of it tonight listening to Evan jawing about his mouldy self."

"He has, poor fellow, an inferiority complex."

"So have I when he talks to me."

The men came in. Two hours later Eve was in bed and asleep.

## 7

The fortnight that followed, spent practically alone with Aunt Fanny, turned a happy-go-lucky girl into a woman.

Mrs. Crampton went on coughing and wheezing. Obstinate she refused to stay in one well-warmed room and refused, even more obstinately, to summon her "medical attendant", Dr. Bishop. Milly, unwittingly, made a joke.

"It's like this, Miss, your aunt calls this a passing indisposition, but it don't pass. And before she finds out where she is, up and about when she ought to be in bed, she'll pass out."

"Right, Milly. I'll take it on myself to ring up Dr. Bishop."

"Thank you, Miss. I *will* say this for him, he does brighten up my mistress."

Dr. Bishop had a chat with his patient in the drawing-room and left it to find Eve awaiting him in the hall. He tapped her cheek and smiled paternally.

"No cause for anxiety, none. I have prescribed a soothing linctus. Her bronchial tubes have troubled her for years, especially at this time of year. She is as sound as a bell."

"Nothing wrong with her heart? What about her blood pressure? Have you vetted her all over? Have you taken any tests?"

A stern man spoke sharply.

"I have been in active practice, young lady, for fifty years. How old are you?"

"Eighteen."

"Eighteen! And you catechise me! I wish you good morning."

He might have spoken less harshly, but Milly was present, ready to open the front door. She opened it; Dr. Bishop stalked out, flushed, indignant, but erect.

"Lor', Miss, you are a—a oner. My! If you gets any of these new diseases, don't send for him."

"I won't. Why, Milly, did he get so cross?"

"I can tell you, Miss. You ask any woman of my age in Limpley. A lot of 'em calls him—Death."

"Milly——!"



"'Tis an old joke, Miss. He took over his father's practice thirty year ago. His father drove about in a brougham like your auntie's, behind two white horses. I disremember what they white horses had to do with it, but any old villager will tell you that when that kerridge stopped at a cottage the neighbours said: 'Hullo! Here's Death.'"

Eve explained.

"In the old days, Milly, Death drove white horses."

"Well, I never."

Eve went to her bedroom and sat down.

She had asked questions of a man who was her mother's doctor, a man seventy years old. They were questions which she had heard Miss Poindexter ask of the school doctor, Dr. Anstey, a young man. Also she could recall what Mim had said about the noblest profession in the world. Mim, although a Games Mistress, could be as impressive as the Head. *What had she said?* She had linked together doctors and parsons. She might have included schoolmasters. Her words drifted back: "Beware of labels, Eve. A man may call himself a doctor after he's forgotten the little he ever knew. There are doctors who devote their lives to their splendid vocation. Some have experimented on themselves and died. A parson may be a saint. I think of a great doctor as God's elect. But, oh, dear! there are quacks and humbugs who ought to be hounded out of their consulting-rooms and pulpits."

Eve sat still, with her head between her hands. She had no faith in Dr. Bishop. Aunt Fanny, when she wheezed and coughed, grew so breathless. . . . She would put her hand to her throat and heart.

What could she do about it?

But what she did do must be told in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER TEN

### I

THE LINCTUS PREPARED BY DR. BISHOP MIGHT HAVE BEEN COMPOUNDED of sugar and water. Milly (who "made bold" to sip it) declared that it was. On the morning following the old gentleman's visit, Eve, as the grandfather clock in the hall struck nine, entered the dining-room to find to her dismay a cover laid for one. Milly said mournfully:

"'Tis as I expected, Miss. My pore dear lady is no better. For the first time in twenty years of service I've had my way with her. She's having her breakfast in bed. She sent her love to you and you're not to worry. And—and"—her voice quavered—"she wants to be left—undisturbed. On no account am I to ring up Doctor."

"Ought I to read prayers, Milly?"

"Well, Miss, have you ever done it?"

"Never."

"You couldn't do it as Madam does."

This was true. Mrs. Crampton, as soon as her four maids were all in a row (looking very unlike Columbines), would kneel down on a high footstool opposite her tea-equipage. Instantly, the maids, standing at attention, would turn their faces to the red flock wallpaper and sink to their knees. Then their mistress would read from a manual used by her own mother a Victorian invocation superbly worded, an almost imperative call to a Heavenly Father, demanding His Presence and active co-operation in domestic duties not to be shirked without imperilling His displeasure. As a child, Eve made sure that such a call was answered. . . .

"I couldn't, Milly. If Aunt Frances has had a restless night, she may doze off."

"I hope so."

Milly left the room. Eve made an indifferent breakfast. A few lines from her mother cheered her. The pair were at the Imperial Hotel. Aunt Fanny had insisted on defraying the expenses of the honeymoon, a small grant-in-aid in addition to a cheque for one hundred pounds. Sybil wrote happily, but Eve couldn't wean thoughts from her own unhappiness. If Aunt Fanny was "in" for a severe bronchial attack, Mrs. Woodward would come to her. The honeymoon would be wrecked. More, much more, Aunt Fanny would be furious with her niece for imparting bad news at such a time. Leaving a sausage untasted, Eve peeled and ate a Comice pear. She knew, and Milly knew, that Mrs. Crampton ought to remain in her bedroom even if she refused to remain in bed. . . .

Presently Milly came back to clear away the breakfast things. She frowned when she saw the untasted sausage.

"This will never do."

Eve misunderstood her.

"You're right. If my mother were here——"

"Now, Miss, your mother is where she ought to be. Not

a word to her. I popped upstairs and listened at the door. All was quiet, so I peeped in. She's asleep, but wheezing a bit. I says, and Cook agrees with me, that we can't go against orders. It's a nice day. Maybe you'll step over to *your* cottage."

Slight emphasis on the personal pronoun arrested attention. Local gossip had it that Mrs. Woodward would never sell *Meadow-sweet*. She would give it to her daughter. Sybil, after a short talk with a Guildford real estate agent, had abandoned the hope of letting it during the winter. When spring came she would have no difficulty in doing so. Meanwhile, Mrs. Tagg, living within a stone's-throw, would keep a watchful eye on it."

"Yes, Milly, very happy thought. You see, if Dr. Bishop called in on his morning round, I should be out."

"How true, Miss."

"Damn! I—I beg your pardon. *Swear not at all . . .!* Who said that?"

"We all do it, Miss, when we're upset. May I ask what's upset you?"

"I must be less selfish. I'll hold the fort with you, old dear. I've a letter or two to write. I won't budge out of this house till after luncheon."

"Very good, Miss."

2

Alone in the prim drawing-room, Eve was destined to undergo a quaint experience. Possibly her guardian angel took pity on her. She wrote a letter to her mother. She glanced at the *Morning Post*. She laid out a Patience and abandoned it. The minutes seemed to crawl by. None the less, she consoled herself with the hope that Aunt Fanny must be asleep. After all, it was inconceivable that Dr. Bishop was altogether ga-ga. It was said of him by Mrs. Wilmot that he was faithful in attendance on well-to-do patients. Eve had curled herself up, sitting on one leg, in Aunt Fanny's armchair when Milly came in, shut the door, advanced a few steps, and looked portentous. Eve jumped up.

"Auntie is worse——?"

"No, dear, she's still asleep. A gentleman, if he is a gentleman, has called to see *you*."

"Why haven't you shown him in?"

"He's in the hall, Miss. I left him a-smoking a cigarette."

"Who can he be, Milly? You asked his name?"

Milly came close to her, lowering her voice.

"He may be mental, Miss. *He refused to give his name.* If he hadn't come in a be-utiful car, I'd have told him to get out and stay out. What did he say? Oh, yes. He replied, pert as pert: 'What's in a name, sweetheart?'"

"He called you sweetheart——! Perhaps you ought to ring up the police?"

"Not so loud. He may be at the keyhole. I wouldn't put it past him. Sweetheart——! I wouldn't walk out with him not if it were never so. I'd a mind to smack his freckly face, red-headed too—a Ginger. Well, Miss, he told me to tell you that a beetle was on the wing."

"Of course I'll see him."

"You know his name, Miss?"

"Lord Claud Beaumanoir, a cousin."

"Gracious! Another lord? Am I to beg his lordship's pardon? I was short with him."

The Beetle entered. Milly, who lingered for a moment before leaving the room, saw Ginger approach her young lady—he had thrown away his cigarette—bow and make a deprecating gesture.

"I warned you, loveliest, that I should make an informal call, and here I am."

Milly left the room, but it must be set down that she lingered in the hall, about a foot away from the drawing-room door.

"Beetle," said Eve fervently, "I'm so very, very glad to see you."

"This is rejuvenating to a broken, aged man. Why are you so glad to see me?"

"Because I was praying, yes, praying for a man. Sit down. How did you know I was here?"

"Alaric told me. I saw him yesterday. So the virgin is awakened. She wants a man, bless her!"

"It's the oddest coincidence. There *is* a man, he lives next door, Colonel Wilmot. Not a minute ago I'd made up my mind to ring him up: I must have a man's advice, and I can't leave this house."

"Are you stricken with infantile paralysis?"

She explained at length. The Beetle behaved himself. He appeared to be an understanding person; he wanted to be helpful. Could Eve, on her own initiative, call in another doctor, Dr. Anstey of Guildford, who was up to date?

The Beetle stroked his chin.

"A poser, Eve. You couldn't do it without your aunt's consent. Medical etiquette is the devil. Has she a temperature?"

"I don't know; I—I forgot to ask."

"You can take her temperature."

"You won't believe it; there isn't a clinical thermometer in the house. We have one at the cottage. She's had wonderful health, bar these bronchial attacks. And a doddering old fool was hopping mad with me because I asked him if he'd done what Dr. Anstey would do, and always does do. What is driving me crazy mad is that Aunt Frances has such childish faith in him. He's always made light of her few colds and coughs. And always she throws them off. She's had a bad night; now she's asleep."

The Beetle was blessed or cursed with robust health. According to his mother, robust health was a curse, because it made men unsympathetic and disdainful of the ailments of others. He stopped stroking his chin.

"If what you tell me is true, if your aunt has a cast-iron constitution, aren't you fussing yourself unnecessarily?"

"Perhaps I am. Anyway, we can do nothing. I do wish you could stay to luncheon."

"Can't I? I came here hoping to give you a tophole feed at the *Hind's Head*, not far from here. It's run by a genius who provides the best food and drink out of London. I buzzed down in my Swallow. She's outside."

"How I'd love to swoop off with you. It's simply—impos. Mum would let me go with you; Aunt Fanny wouldn't. If you'd give me another chance when Mum gets back to the Vicarage——"

"Give you another chance? You wait and see. This," his face brightened, "is a tonic. Look here, can I linger a little longer?" She nodded. "I've had a knock, two knocks in two months. I told you I was a broken man."

"Beetle, I thought you were joking. You look marvellous, I mean absolutely fit. What has happened?"

"We're pals. I can tell you. I meant to tell you after a topping luncheon. You gave me the first knock. I intended to ask you to accept the dregs of a misspent life. Sit tight! I'm only half a fool. You'll never marry a fellow who loves you, unless you love him? Am I right?" Again she nodded. "And what sense I have in me told me you *couldn't* love me, although you liked me."

"Beetle, I did like you; I do like you."

"More tonic. At Flam, after the last shoot, you saw what I

was up to, and let me down easily. I took a pull on myself. I went on to shoot grouse near Lairg, at a lodge taken by the Kingfisher."

"The Kingfisher?"

"We call her that. She's the grass widow of a criminally rich Yank. He piles up the shekels in Chicago, she spends 'em over here. She has a daughter, not a flier, like you, but a stay-at-home piece, sick to death of being hawked about. Her Momma is ambitious, and the heftiest gate-crasher in Europe. No names, but she wanted to rope in a king's son for her pickaninny. That's why we call her the Kingfisher."

"I see."

Eve recalled gossip from Betty's lips. The Beetle went on;

"I didn't play the game, honey. I was asked up there to shoot grouse, not to make love to a future queen."

"Did you make love to her?"

"You're still a kid——"

"I am not."

"You are; and I hate to soil your immaculate mind. Girls are as idiotic as boys. Pique comes into it. A girl can't marry the cove she loves, so she marries the next blighter who comes along. You were off my map. Momma's pet wanted to pick a man of her choice. Well, we two clicked. To avoid a horrid row we became engaged—secretly. Nobody knows this except you."

Eve beamed at him.

"Beetle, dear, I'm proud to be your friend. You felt ashamed of yourself; you broke off the secret engagement?"

"No; she did."

"Why?"

"Can a leopard change his spots? A red-headed lassie was one of the guests; she couldn't live without a spot of petting. They call it a lodge, but it's a big house full of cosy corners. My girl accused the red-headed lassie of impropriety. She had seen a man kissing her friend, but it was too dark to see the man. Red-head retorted sharply, 'I've seen *him* kissing *you*.' The drinks," he concluded mournfully, "were on me."

"Oh, dear! You are the limit. You didn't deserve the first knock, but you did the second."

"Being a kid, the inwardness of it all escapes you. It escaped me till I was back in barracks. I feel cursedly sore, because I inflicted both knocks on myself. Each time I asked for trouble and got it. Vanity is crushed. I'm jolly glad my girl broke off the engagement."

He looked very sorry for himself. Eve's resentment oozed out of her.

"Have a heart," she suggested. "And if I'm partly to blame I must make excuses for you. I do wish you could stay to luncheon. But, really, I shouldn't dare to invite my own mother without speaking first to Aunt Frances. If she wakes——"

As she spoke Milly entered. From the expression on her face, it looked as if Mrs. Crampton might never wake again.

"Madam is awake, Miss. She's dreadfully breathless. I'm not to say one word to you; she told me to ring up the doctor."

The Beetle had left his chair. He stood at the window with his back to the women.

"You've rung him up?" Eve asked.

"Yes, Miss. He's out on his rounds; they don't know where he is; he won't be back till one or later; and it's just gone twelve."

The Beetle faced them. He spoke with authority, very quietly.

"I'll fetch another doctor. Go back to Mrs. Crampton. Don't leave her. Tell her that the doctor will be with her soon. Did you give her anything?"

"Yes, sir—pardon!—yes, my lord, *sal volatile*."

"That acts quickly. Was she less breathless when you left her?"

"She *were*—was, I mean. After she'd swallowed it, she told me, much more quiet-like, not to tell Miss Golightly. I think, Miss, it would upset her if you went to her."

"Miss Golightly is coming with me. I don't know any doctor in Guildford; she does."

"Very good, my lord."

Milly withdrew. Eve was standing still, staring, open-mouthed, at a stranger. He said sharply:

"It's cold outside. Put on a warm coat; I have a rug; it's an open car. If we can't find your man——"

"Dr. Anstey. I can ring him up."

"I was about to suggest that. If he's at home, we'll bring him here; if he isn't, we'll find another fellow."

He held the door open; she hurried into the hall to the telephone. The Beetle, quite calmly, put on his overcoat and cap and then proceeded to start up his car. In less than a couple of minutes Eve joined him.

"Dr. Anstey is at home. He thanked me for coming to fetch him."

The car purred down the laurel-lined drive and on to the high road, broad, free from traffic, in perfect order.

"She can do seventy," said the Beetle, as he accelerated. Then he gave undivided attention to the Swallow.

## 3

Dare we affirm that the change in the man turned Eve there and then into a woman? She was immensely grateful to him, unable to express her gratitude. Silently, she thanked God that Colonel Wilmot was not beside her. He would have tried to be cheery and paternal. Also, he was an indifferent driver. She glanced timidly at the stranger. His eyes were on the road; his jaw protruded; the knuckles on his brown hands showed white.

They raced down the hill to the west of Guildford.

"Where does Anstey live?" he asked, as the car slowed down. "No use giving me his address. Say 'Straight on', or 'Turn left or right.'"

"Straight on and up the hill."

"Lucky he wasn't on his morning rounds."

"He does research work; he runs a nursing-home."

"Young, middle-aged or old?"

"Young."

"Bedside manner?"

"Oh, no. Turn left, and then right. It's a white house, standing in a garden. He'll be waiting for us."

"When we get there hop out. Take the rug, I've only one, and sit with him on the back seat. Tell him all you can. I've a muffler in my coat pocket. Shall I fish it out for you?"

"I'm quite all right. Here we are."

Anstey was on the front-door steps, bag in hand. Eve introduced him to the Beetle, who remained at the wheel. Anstey was tall, thin, blackavised, with one eyebrow higher than the other which gave him a quizzical look. He had the hands of a pianist, hands with spatulate fingers.

"You will sit with me, Dr. Anstey, and I've been ordered to tell you all I can."

The Swallow swooped back to *The Gables*.

## 4

Milly was in Mrs. Crampton's bedroom. Alice, the housemaid, was in the hall.

"Madam," she said to Eve, "is expecting Dr. Anstey. Milly rang the bell and I answered it."



"My aunt hasn't left her bed?"

"No, Miss, but she talks of coming down for lunch. Milly just humoured her." She turned to the Beetle. "I have a message for you, my lord. Mrs. Crampton's compliments and thanks. She hopes you will give her the pleasure of your company at lunch."

Eve smiled.

"Take Dr. Anstey upstairs, Alice. His lordship will stay to luncheon."

Dr. Anstey ascended the staircase. The Beetle followed Eve into the drawing-room.

"I shall be a nuisance," he said curtly. "I had better go now."

"You must stay to hear what Dr. Anstey says. Then, of course, you will do as you please."

"If, after we've heard his report, you ask me to stay, I will. How did your aunt find out I was here?"

"You called me a kid. Milly is forty. If she were sixteen, she'd know enough to try to make Aunt Fanny think that I shouldn't be chattering with a visitor if I thought her to be seriously ill."

"I agree. If I can help you in any way, I'm at your service."

Uncle Alaric might have been speaking.

"Beetle, I think I shall call you Lord Claud. I hardly recognise you."

"You've never seen me on parade."

To her relief, he laughed.

"What amuses you?" she asked.

"If a leopard can't rid himself of his spots, a fool can't shed his folly. I'll own up. I'm upset because you're upset. When I'm upset I revert to type. I inherited, mind you, a courtesy title. I hate it, damned expensive decoration. If you have any bowels of compassion, you'll invite me to sit on that forbidding sofa and hold my hand. Why have we been glaring at each other?"

Eve indicated an armchair.

"Sit in that. I'll stand. . . . Then I can look down on a beetle." He shrugged his shoulders and obeyed his hostess. "You are a pal worth having. Colonel Wilmot would never have acted as promptly as you did. And—and if I'd called in a boy I know, who really believes that he'll be an ambassador some day, he'd have grovelled."

"Who is that portly gentleman over the mantelpiece?"

"My uncle, Alderman Thomas Crampton."

"He must have done himself well. He suggests calipash and calipee with Mansion House punch."

"Thank goodness! You're yourself again."

"I hope not. Tell me, this young doctor . . . is he a friend of yours?"

"Never have I spoken to him until today."

"Why were you so keen to call him in?"

Eve gave good reasons. Miss Poindexter had chosen this young man, younger than he looked, as the *Highmount* doctor, because already in Guildford he was acclaimed as a miracle-monger. He used new drugs, lately discovered, unknown to Dr. Bishop and other elderly practitioners. He was called in by them as a consultant. In his nursing-home he had cured the incurable.

"Would you say that your aunt was a judge of character?"

"Yes, I should."

"Then why has she stuck to a dodderer?"

"Because he stuck to her."

"Did any of the girls at your school fall for this miracle-monger?"

Loyalty to *Highmount* exacted a fib.

"They kept it to themselves if they did," she replied.

"Girls get after the men in this year of disgrace," he muttered.

"That must bother you dreadfully?" hazarded Eve.

"A man with my highfalutin, semaphoric name couldn't run away from a young lady, could he?"

Names, so Eve reflected, had bewildering significance. Dr. Bishop's name, possibly, forced the old fellow to adopt the gracious, benevolent mien which endeared him to elderly patients. With a name like her own, as Mim had told her, she must be careful not to plod stodgily along.

"You say you hate your title. Do you hate your name?"

"What does it suggest to you?"

He spoke gravely with his thoughts upstairs. This clever young doctor would not scamp his duties. What report would he make? Would he speak frankly? Would Eve and he get the truth? Meanwhile, idle chatter would serve its purpose. Already Eve was smiling again, standing with head erect. She paused before she answered him.

"It suggests one of our lovely old manor houses standing in quiet gardens."

"M'm . . . Such houses are often haunted."

"I don't believe in ghosts——"

"I do."

"You do?"

"Beaumanoir is seething with ghosts. . . . None of us has seen one. But a tough nut, like I am, is uncannily aware of 'em. When you come to us, as I hope you will, we'll play 'Out pounce Piggy', a fearsome game. One of the players hides; the others wander in and out of darkened rooms and passages, stealing along on tip-toe. If one of 'em sees Piggy, Piggy has lost. But if Piggy pounces and grabs you by the leg, he wins, and the game begins again."

"Why didn't we play it at Flam?"

"Di hates it. What was I getting at? Queer things have happened at Beaumanoir. No Glamis mystery, thank the Lord. I'm groping for words I never use. Am I boring you?"

"Beetle, I'm awfully interested. Go on."

"Ah—ha! Go on. That's your little slogan. Suppose you have to go back? And if you live in a huge house, part of it six hundred years old, you have to go back and back and back. The ghosts at Beaumanoir are—are, I have it, *associations*. I become a ghost when I potter about the portrait gallery . . . and I cease to be myself. I—I become a sort of—of composite photograph." He broke off, because Eve was apparently not listening. She had half closed her eyes. She had laid a slim finger on her lower lip. He went on: "Wake up! Are you seeing a ghost?"

"I—I believe I am. I was listening to every word; I was thrilled."

"You looked queer."

"I felt queer. You'd pounced on me. And somehow I went back."

"To where?"

"To my grandfather, who died before I was born. Uncle Alaric has never mentioned him. My grandfather was born at Flamborough Castle, not long after it was built. Of course you know that—that——"

"I've forgotten what I knew."

"Dear of you to say so. But a minute ago I felt that he was in this room and speaking to me."

"What did he say?"

"I felt him touch me; and—and he whispered: 'Eve, there's a lot of me in you.'"

"You've got it as I've got it again and again."

As he spoke, the door opened and Anstey came in.

## 5

His face was inscrutable. The Beetle stood up. He spoke first:

"My cousin, Dr. Anstey, hopes that you will be frank with her. I'll leave you together."

"Don't go," Eve said firmly.

"There is no reason why you should go, Lord Claud. The little I have to tell can be said in two minutes. I won't sit down," Eve had indicated a chair, "because I'm pressed for time. Dr. Bishop's patient has a small patch on the left lung; she is running a temperature not, not alarmingly high, but a couple of points above normal. Her pulse is strong but intermittent. Her heart has been weakened by these fits of coughing, which accounts for the breathlessness. She must remain in bed until the patch is cleared away. One of the new drugs will do that. I am not alarmed. Nor, happily, is she. If your cousin, Miss Golightly, will drive me to Dr. Bishop's house, he will be back from his round. He, I know, will drive me back to Guildford. A night nurse will come some time this afternoon."

"When will *you* come again?" Eve asked.

"Mrs. Crampton is not my patient. Dr. Bishop will come here as reasonably soon as possible."

Of medical etiquette Eve knew nothing. She lost her head, but not her powers of speech. A very angry woman confronted a still young man.

"Will you please tell me why Dr. Bishop did not find out yesterday what you have found out today?"

O Father of Medicine . . . ! What murders have been committed under the compulsion of the Hippocratic oath . . . ! It is conceivable that the beloved apostle, loyal to a sometime friend and fellow-worker, may have attempted to whitewash the black crime of Judas Iscariot.

Anstey stiffened.

"I am responsible for my own actions. It would be most improper if I questioned the actions of a—a *colleague* much older than myself."

"That's the trouble," she retorted hotly, "Dr. Bishop is too old for his work, too old and—and too indolent."

"Miss Golightly—I!"

Eve was glaring at him. To her amazement, the Beetle gripped her arm, pushed her back, and took her place. Chaotic

though her thoughts were, she submitted. Indeed, her fancy hypnotised her. An ancestor of the Beetle, the first marquess, had been a famous statesman. Had his ghost flitted into the room? It couldn't be the Beetle who was now facing Dr. Anstey.

"Forgive my cousin. Is it indiscreet for me to ask you under what conditions you *could* attend Mrs. Crampton?"

"There are two conditions, Lord Claud. Mrs. Crampton could call on my services—and I should answer the call—if it was her wish to change one physician for another. The second condition, the alternative condition, is Dr. Bishop's request to me to take his place."

"Naturally you couldn't suggest that to him?"

"It would be most irregular if I did."

No more could be said: no more was said. Dr. Anstey bowed to Eve and went out of the room followed by the Beetle.

## 6

In ten minutes the Beetle was back in the drawing-room. He was himself again.

"This Anstey bird, Eve, is no twitterer, but I got more out of him. Your aunt will be on her pins again in a few days. You and Milly can look after her in the daytime."

"We shall. I've seen her. Hopeless!"

"Hopeless?"

"She's almost spry, looking forward to seeing Dr. Bishop. How I hate that old humbug; and I'm so glad he hates me. Anyway, there's not a chance of Auntie changing her doctor."

"Cheer up! Your miracle-monger will give the old lad a once-over; teach his granddad how to play draughts, eh? And, mark me, when Mrs. Crampton is on her pins, he'll scoop up the credit and the cash."

"I could kill him, if I were sure I shouldn't be hanged."

Milly came in to say that luncheon was served.

In her presence—Alice was with her mistress—the youthful pair chattered gaily enough. With the coffee, Milly proffered a box of cigars brought especially for Uncle Alaric. No old brandy was placed on the table. The Beetle smoked slowly a Corona and went his way.

Eve heard that her aunt was asleep; so she remained in the drawing-room, assembling her parts of speech. She had told Milly that she wished to see Dr. Bishop before he was taken

upstairs. Desperately she clung to the forlorn hope that Dr. Bishop was not as ga-ga as he looked. He must, she thought, be ashamed of himself. Under careful, ladylike handling, he might entrust his patient to the clever man who had found out how serious the case was. She must mind her step, justify her name. For the moment the Beetle was out of her mind. However, he had established himself in her affections as a tower of strength. What a pal——! Ought she to have asked him to deal with Dr. Bishop? She was sure that all bishops loved lords. . . .

She put coal on the fire. Between the heavily-curtained windows was a narrow mirror reaching from carpet to ceiling. Eve stood in front of it, smiling. Her smile displeased her. If the Beetle could alter his funny face, why couldn't she do the same? Could she—could she look like Mum? Could she compose her features? Mum's serenity was her outstanding asset. At her best, Mum never smiled hypocritically. But everybody hoped that she would smile. Yes; Mum somehow provoked anticipation.

She started. Thinking of Mum had made her for a fleeting second look like her. She addressed the image in the mirror.

"Doctor," she cooed, "I'm so very sorry for what happened yesterday. But you are so clever; you will make allowances for a silly, impertinent girl, won't you?"

Her voice died away.

"That sounded," Eve reflected, "so schoolgirly. And what a filthy lie! I must trust to luck. Is there a ghost in this room? Is Uncle Tom here? What would he say?"

Frowningly, she turned her back on her image and sat down. Luck befriended her. She was spared a long wait on the anxious seat. At three, Milly ushered in the dodderer.

"Dr. Bishop, Miss."

Eve jumped up. She thought she could detect a change for the better in her visitor. He appeared to be less sure of himself, slightly deflated. Obviously he expected an apology.

"Sorry," she said, "about yesterday. You gave me beans and I deserved 'em. Forgive me."

"My dear, that will do—that will do. I am a father, a grandfather. And you bright young people are—a—a thought too outspoken. I guessed why you wanted to see me. Now I'll go to your good aunt."

"You can give me one more minute. Aunt Frances is asleep."

Dr. Bishop smiled blandly.

"I hoped to find her asleep. I had a talk with Dr. Anstey. My patient has an iron constitution."

"But there is a patch on the left lung?"

"Dr. Anstey told you that?"

"My cousin was with me."

"Your cousin?"

"Yes; Lord Claud Beaumanoir. He drove Dr. Anstey from here to your house."

"Dr. Anstey merely told me that he had had a lift. I drove him back to Guildford to make arrangements for a night nurse. She will come about tea-time."

"Dr. Anstey," Eve went on discreetly, "mightn't have told *me* about the patch. He told *us*. And he said something about her heart and temperature."

Dr. Bishop inhaled deeply. Young doctors, he was thinking, were too outspoken.

"Did he say anything else.?"

"Did he? Half a mo—I beg your pardon, half a moment. He said something about a wonderful new drug——"

"Ah! One of the sulphonamides——"

"He didn't call it that."

"He spoke of it to me. I have never used it. I distrust profoundly—*experiments*."

He might have added that he had flatly refused to use the drug, which had led to a quite friendly altercation.

"Did you know, Doctor, yesterday, that Aunt Frances had a patch on her lung?"

This was most indiscreet. Dr. Bishop frowned and then smiled indulgently:

"I did not. We are begging a question, my dear young lady. There is, today, serious, not too serious trouble. I had no reason to suppose yesterday that a patch was there. It may have formed in the night. Let me tell you that a little learning is a dangerous thing."

"I know it is. But Dr. Anstey has a lot of learning. And he's nuts—I mean frightfully keen on this new drug. If Aunt Fanny's heart is wonky——"

She broke off, scarlet with annoyance. Why couldn't she talk as Mum would have talked? Once more she had rubbed this old stiff the wrong way.

Dr. Bishop's face was intimidating. Little did Eve know that Dr. Anstey had suggested taking "tracings" of Mrs. Crampton's heart action. Dr. Bishop, not in possession of the electrical appliance used to take such tracings, had curtly refused to do anything of the sort. It had suddenly occurred to him that if—

if his patient's heart was "wonky", and if pneumonia set in, her days might be numbered. And then, if she passed out, this cousin might pose very awkward questions.

Eve said hastily:

"You are going to use this wonder drug?"

"No."

Eve was beside herself with rage and indignation.

"Why not?" she had the impudence to ask.

To her surprise, he kept his temper, but he spoke as if he were dealing with a fractious child.

"Come, come, I shall answer your question, although my answer will be over your head. This new drug, I admit, is a wonder drug, but," his voice became portentous, "it cannot be taken with impunity by certain persons. It may cause debilitating nausea. With my elderly patients I run no risks."

"You *are* talking over my head. If Dr. Anstey is ready to take such risks when he hasn't yet built up a practice like yours, why shouldn't you?"

This time she had spoken quietly and without using slang. Dr. Bishop could come swiftly to a decision when his own interests were imperilled. He knew, none better, than a general practitioner, when faced with complications, was wise to suggest the calling in of a specialist.

"If your aunt is asleep, Eve, I shall not disturb her. You can tell her what, most reluctantly, I have come here to tell her. You have just asked me if I should administer this new drug. Dr. Anstey will administer it. He is a specialist. I have decided to leave your aunt in his capable hands."

He shook her hand and made, under the circumstances, a creditable exit.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### I

EVE HAD PLUCKED A PIPPIN AND WAS UNAWARE OF HER ACHIEVEMENT. She had told herself that a prayer had been answered. Mim was of opinion that prayers were answered if a girl prayed hard enough. As soon as Dr. Bishop left the room, she executed a *pas seul*, pirouetting on her toes. Then she sat down to consider how she should break to Aunt Fanny news that might upset her. It was so disconcerting to rehearse lines and not deliver



them. Why had she let "wonky" loose? Had she known it, that word had crashed into Dr. Bishop's head. It had dire significance for him. *He had used it himself.* It described a cardiac condition which he had good reason to dread. Dr. Anstey, most modestly, almost deferentially, had said: "Of course you read that article in the *Lancet* a fortnight ago? You didn't? If I can find it, I'll send it to you. It dealt with the treatment of heart failure caused by bronchial pneumonia. I was surprised to find your patient's blood pressure low—lower, I need hardly tell you, than it should be. The patch on the lung won't worry you. The danger spot is her heart." Dr. Bishop had assured him that Mrs. Crampton's heart had never given him a moment's uneasiness, and Dr. Anstey had looked incredulous. . . .

Eve read a novel, or attempted to do so, till Milly apprised her that Mrs. Crampton was awake and wished to see her.

"I've had a most refreshing sleep, child. Did you enjoy your luncheon with Lord Claud?"

"I did. We owe him a lot. I never knew it till today, but he's a go-getter. How did you like Dr. Anstey, Auntie?"

"I liked him, although he fussed over me. I've met him once or twice. Is it really necessary that I should have a night nurse?"

"I say it isn't. I can sit here with you."

"You? Certainly not. Absurd——!"

Eve was now impaled and wriggling on the horns of a dilemma. If she told her aunt that her condition was serious, she might provoke a fit of coughing. On the other hand, if she made light of it, she might be ordered to cancel the engagement of the nurse.

"It's like this, Aunt Fanny. How often you've told me that it's better to err on the safe side. If you had another attack of breathlessness, and if a nurse were with you, she could stop it instantly."

"Yes, yes, that's true. I must put up with the poor creature. Has Dr. Bishop called and gone away because I was asleep?"

"He has. I've a message from him. He's so thoughtful and considerate." She paused, heartened by this lie. A merciful God would forgive her. Aunt Fanny might refuse to change her doctor. It was all-important to smooth away difficulties. She continued: "And he's so plucky, out in all weathers; and at his time of life ought he to get out of a warm bed and rush to a patient?"

Mrs. Crampton shook her head.

"I'm selfish. I should have thought of that. If I have a night nurse, I shan't need him."

"With 'flu rampant in the village, he's dreadfully overworked. We couldn't get him this morning. His devotion to you, Auntie, is wonderful. When he asked me to deliver his message, he—he was distressed, he—he looked his age."

This was not a fib.

"Ah! His age. . . . He is over seventy. He ought to retire. I have told him so."

"You told him. Now, now I understand all that was in his mind which, out of consideration for you, he didn't say."

"Please tell me what he did say?"

"Well, with the deepest regret, he wants Dr. Anstey to give you the attention which he can't give. I—I have an idea that Dr. Bishop, if he thought of himself, ought to be in bed. Maybe he's sickening with 'flu."

Eve's voice quavered. She loathed herself for lying, but Veal sense told her that nothing else would serve. A Veal exercised her sense.

"This, my dear, is a shock. I must endure it with fortitude. If, through ME, poor Dr. Bishop had to take to his bed, I should never forgive myself. Still, it looks as if I were suffering from more than a passing indisposition."

What would Sapphira have said?

Eve hesitated and—plunged.

"You may have to lie in bed for a week. I can read to you. If you were seriously ill, you would have to have a day nurse. Dr. Anstey will come every day. He's not a G.P. He has no round. And everybody calls him a miracle-worker."

"I am resigned, child. You have broken this sad news to me most considerately. I suppose I am less strong than I was."

"I can tell you something to cheer you up. If you were really ill, Dr. Bishop would wire for Mum——"

"He would. On your word of honour, did he ask for her address?"

"He never mentioned Mum; nor did Dr. Anstey."

"Then this is an indisposition?"

"Auntie, it's more than that. Now, you mustn't talk. Shall I read you the leading article in the *M.P.*? You'll love it."

"Tch!"

"You will: it knocks the stuffing out of the Government."

"Read it to me, darling. Government——! Mis-government! . . . A lot of fools who believe that all poor men are honest and all rich men thieves."

She wheezed.

Ten days later she left her bed.

Meanwhile Sybil and Quentin were back in the Vicarage. Not till Sybil reached Limpley did she hear of her sister's indisposition. Aunt Frances no longer made light of it.

"Humanly speaking, Sybil, I owe my life to Dr. Anstey and our child. SHE is OUR child . . . SHE is a VEAL."

Sybil showed herself to be a Veal. She believed that the harmless trick of exaggeration, a Golightly trick, had been caught by her sister when enfeebled.

"Fanny——! If you were as ill as that, why wasn't I told?"

"Because—please don't frown at me—I—I didn't know that I had been almost at the point of death till I left my bed. When I took to my bed under protest I gave orders that you were not to be told. My orders were obeyed."

"Dear Frances . . . so like you, but I'm puzzled. Has Dr. Bishop retired?"

"Ah! He might have retired permanently; he might have sacrificed his valuable life for ME. I owe him much. Had it not been for HIM, I might at this moment be in foolish ignorance of the—the chastening I've endured."

At great length, with many irrelevancies, Mrs. Crampton told the story of the chastening. There had been, so she affirmed, a conspiracy of silence in *The Gables*. The truth had been kept from the patient for an excellent reason. It might have killed her. Nobody, except the two doctors, had known it. After she had left her bed it was told to her most considerately by Dr. Bishop. He, bless him! had called in a younger man because he himself was dreadfully overworked and on the ragged edge of a breakdown. Dr. Anstey had burked incipient pneumonia, administering a new drug. But the heart had nearly failed . . . it might have stopped its action at any moment. . . .

Sybil, being a Veal, may have salted the statement that Dr. Bishop had been overworked. If she believed that an old man had thrown up a complicated case because he couldn't deal with it, she kept that conviction to herself. Obviously Eve and Milly had not known how complicated it was. Aunt Frances was restored to health; nothing else mattered.

"Our little girl," Mrs. Crampton concluded, "has shown a devotion which amazes me. *Little girl?* Tch! In the past ten

days she has become a—WOMAN. Yes; she has put from her childish ways and childish speech."

Much can happen in ten days. Eve was constrained to resign from the staff at *Highmount*. Miss Poindexter, indeed, approved of this, saying graciously: "You are needed elsewhere." Augustly, she commended Eve's determination to remain at *The Gables* for the winter. The Vicarage had to be rehabilitated. Eve could not live alone at *Meadowsweet*, but she could pop in and out of it during the daytime. Also she had her work, such as it was, in the village. . . .

## 3

When Sybil returned to Limpley, she found in the Vicarage pantry a packing-case. She guessed what was in it; Eve and she unpacked it. A canteen was placed on a table. The key was in the lock. When the lid was raised a sealed letter lay on rows of silver spoons and forks. The letter, so Sybil supposed, held a few lines from the Head of the Golightly family; it could be opened and read later on. Eve laid it aside. Under the table-silver lay an enchanting surprise: a coffee-pot, a teapot, and the usual accessories.

"What a present!" Sybil exclaimed.

"The spoons and forks are new, Mum, but the rest of it is old. I wish I knew the marks. I'm sure it's Georgian. Mrs. Wilmot will expire with envy when she sees it."

The silver had to be arranged on the dining-room table. Quentin might come in at any moment. And so it came to pass that the letter was left unopened till after Eve had gone back to *The Gables*. Sybil read it in her bedroom.

*My dear Cox,*

*Di and I send you this little gift for which you have already thanked me. With it we send our love and benedictions.*

*Ever since you and Eve came to us my conscience has been pricking me. I offer no excuses for myself. My old uncle left Eve a small legacy because he felt that Eve's father and grandfather had been scurvily treated. On my word, I knew nothing of this, but I ought to have known. Since, with the help of my solicitors, I have dug up the facts. Eve's grandfather asked his father to pay debts of honour amounting to ten thousand pounds, a small sum in those days to the Head of our family. But in fairness to him, he*

*had paid other debts contracted by a younger son and had sworn to pay no more. My uncle left England a disgraced and broken man. It is an unhappy fact that a man can seduce his best friend's wife and remain a member of his clubs. He can owe money to a dozen tradesmen. But if he can't meet debts of honour, he becomes a pariah! Mrs. Crompton told me the name of your solicitors. My solicitors talked with a cousin of yours, Mr. John Veal. I have settled ten thousand pounds on you and Eve, in trust. The trustees are Mr. Veal and myself. You will have the income of this till Eve marries. Then the trust ends. You will receive five thousand pounds. So will she, but her capital will not be paid over till she is twenty-one.*

*Yours affectly,  
Alaric.*

Sybil took this letter to Quentin. His small study had to serve as their sitting-room until the drawing-room ceased to be the Young People's Club.

Quentin read the letter. He made one comment:

"What we might have expected from such a man——"

"You didn't expect it?"

"Never."

"Nor did I. He's too generous, Quint. I feel I can't accept such a huge sum of money. I—I can't."

"M'm . . . It isn't yours. Eve has a half interest in it, and—and——"

"Say exactly what's in your mind."

"If she felt as you do, she might change her mind. For that matter, so might you."

"You must decide for both of us."

"I've never known the facts till now. It looks as if Eve's grandfather and father had been scurvily treated. Lord Flamborough is a rich man. This is not a huge sum to him. Another fact pleases me immensely. He must have faith in you and Eve. Otherwise the money would be tied up."

"Then you think we cannot refuse this fortune?"

"It would be churlish to do so; it might make him suspect that you were rancorous."

"Then you must help me to write a letter to him tonight."

"With pleasure."

"If you are pleased, so am I."

He was at his desk. Absentmindedly, he picked up a pencil and fiddled with it, glancing at his rather bleak surroundings. Then he smiled.

"This cuts the knot," he murmured. "We can do what we want to do."

"So we can. Our dream will come true."

At Bournemouth, a mirage had faded away. The pair had seen themselves snugly installed in the cottage with a dilapidated vicarage serving as a hostel. Sybil had entreated her fiancé to leave the ramshackle old house alone till she could help him to make it more habitable. Having little faith in his own taste, he had consented to mark time. As yet no furniture had been taken from *Meadowsweet*. The cottage was big enough for two not three. Rooms would have to be added. No ready cash was available to build rooms.

The almost certainty that their dreams would come true engrossed their attention for half an hour. Presently, Quentin tapped the letter lying on his desk.

"Faith in you, darling, doesn't surprise me. But faith in a girl still in her 'teens rather rattles me. Evidently your cousin is sure she'll marry Mr. Right."

"I'm sure she will."

"The wrong man might squander the money. And Eve might be tempted to gamble."

"Gamble?"

"Have what is called a flutter on the Stock Exchange."

"Not she. If she were hare-brained, she could do that now. I've never told her and I forgot to tell you. The thousand left her by General Golightly is hers now. It became hers on her eighteenth birthday."

"You astound me."

"You're a man. The General was a man of the world. I guessed what was in his mind. He wanted Eve to have her chance. He knew how poor I was. He didn't know how generous Frances is. And it looks to me as if it was—meant."

"This invitation to spend the season in London. We accepted it with grateful and humble hearts, but I loathed the idea of Frances paying for her frocks. And, Quint, she hasn't offered to do so. I decided to let Eve go because I did guess that the dear old fellow wanted Eve to have what Mrs. Tagg calls a 'proper send-off'."

"I can only say that your feminine intuition has not failed you."

Excitedly, they discussed the move back to the cottage. It could not happen for several weeks.

## 4

Mothers are not too quick to detect change in their daughters. Sybil, naturally, was engrossed by the change in herself. She was pleased when Eve said impulsively: "We can't accept these thousands." However, Eve submitted to Quentin's ripe judgment. The three collaborated over a letter of thanks, admirably worded and fragrant with gratitude. Next day Sybil half apologised for not telling Eve that Uncle Charlie's legacy had been a sort of present on her birthday, pin-money.

"Why wasn't I told that before?" she asked.

"A shower of gold killed some girl or other. It might have interfered with your work at school. The excitement over your coming-out put it out of my head."

"Could I, if I were a silly ass, blow the lot? Sorry, Mum, I want to talk as you do."

"You could blow the lot. It's safely invested. From now on you can draw the tiny income from it. Yes; it's time you opened an account at a bank in Guildford. Quentin will see to that. Now it's settled that we are all going back to the cottage, do you want to come to us here or stay with Aunt Fanny?"

"Isn't it my duty to stay with Aunt Fanny till she's quite herself again?"

"Perhaps it is. I should like to think it was your pleasure. You've picked a whole crop of apples in the last fortnight. Aunt Fanny speaks of your—devotion, a big word."

"You bet. I—I mean, it is too big. I love being with her; she is so patient, so brave. She says she didn't know that it was nip and tuck. Bother——!"

"Talk as you used to talk."

"Dr. Anstey forbade her to lift a heavy book. She knew all right; but she didn't want to spoil your honeymoon. I must tell you something. Sitting all day in Auntie's room I had time to get on to myself. Am I queer in any way?"

"Queer? You are, thank God, a healthy, happy, normal girl, full of beans."

"If you say beans, I can. But it's queer to me, very, very queer, that I know myself to be different from other girls, the girls of my age. I noticed the difference, just blinked at it, long ago, when I went to *Highmount*. I daresay you made me what I am. You used to tell me, ever so quietly, that if I wanted the old apples I should have to work for them. You told me to work

like a black when I was doing lessons or playing games. The funny thing is I did. And I got a kick out of both. You may not believe it, but I got a kick out of nursing Auntie. I get a kick when I do what Uncle Quint calls my duty in the village. The Wilmot girls are for ever grouching and whining. I got a terrific kick out of my week at the Castle, but it didn't bother me to come back to high tea and my job at *Highmount*. I'm looking forward to this season in London, but I know I shall be jolly glad to get back to the cottage when it's over. I've got it off my chest. I say I am queer."

Sybil smiled at her.

"I repeat what I said, Eve. You are a natural, normal girl. The Wilmot girls are weaklings, like their mother."

"I 'spect—I expect I'm a Veal."

"You're half a Veal and half a Golightly. Stay on at *The Gables* for a few weeks. We could move back to *Meadowsweet*, but we should have no quiet with workmen in and out of the cottage."

"I think myself the luckiest girl in the world; it would be devastating if the luck turned."

## 5

This talk pleased but puzzled the mother. Eve, evidently, had left the opposite sex out of court. Maiden meditation had found and left her fancy free. Was this normal? She attempted to stand in Eve's slippers, recalling her own youth. Life had been humdrum in her father's house. Before she was seventeen she had thought, 'I must marry and get out of this.' She had escaped from bondage, but she had married Jim Golightly because she loved him. On the other hand, if a girl loved her home life, it might get a stranglehold on her. The modern miss had begun to prattle flippantly of marriage. She declared it to be a gamble. If a girl picked a loser, she could get rid of him and bait her hook for a winner. Sybil had not been dismayed when the Beetle paid her daughter marked attention. She was sure that Eve's liking for him would never warm into love. She was sorry for Evan Vallance; he was baying the moon, poor boy. If Eve found a young fellow who made her little heart flutter, her mother would be the first to be told. Having increasing faith in Quentin's judgments, she decided to have a word with him.

"Does it seem at all odd to you," she said, after dinner, "that Eve is not the least flirtatious?"



"Odd? M'm . . . How do you know she isn't?"

"Take it from me that I do know."

He smiled ironically.

"Every fond mother thinks she knows. You may be right. The good old game is *vieux jeu*. Miss 1930 goes for her man gaily. I've never seen Eve do that, although none could call her prim or coy. What do I know about girls? Nothing."

"Quint, I hoped you would be a help to me. Eve talks more freely to you than she does to me. Are you hinting that still waters run deep?"

"Dear Sybil, I abominate cliché. Scott wrote of Tweed as broad and deep. It's broad opposite Norham, but it's not deep. I've often wondered why I left girls alone when I was a youngster. Was I odd?"

"You may have been hard to please, fastidious."

"Not I." He frowned. "But it is like this: I was a fifth son without a penny to my name. I loathed the idea of buying love. I noticed something else. As a runner I was often in training. When in training, the only lust of the flesh that dominated me was my ravenous appetite for more food. Out of training I had to concentrate on my work. I kept away from girls. I was in no position to support a wife until I came here. Soon afterwards I, a parson, fell desperately in love with another man's wife. Cut that out. We'll return to your lamb. I think it likely that hard training of mind and body has made Eve the jolly girl she is. She's keen to be an all-rounder. There's another thing——"

He paused, fingering his watchchain. When he spoke, it amused his wife to note a blush.

"She looks more like a boy than a girl. How does she look—stripped?"

"Quint——!"

"I've never seen her in a bathing suit."

"She looks, I admit it, too like a boy. Slowly she's filling out."

"If she doesn't look like a girl, why do you expect her to behave like a girl?"

"You are helping me. I'm a fool not to have thought of this. Physically, I was more developed at sixteen than she is at eighteen."

"We have it. Leave Nature to deal with her."

## 6

Aunt Frances enjoyed her convalescence.

Eve rolled into Guildford in her aunt's brougham to do the shopping. By this time she was on friendly terms with Anstey, who had been faithful in daily attendance on Mrs. Crampton. Eve chuckled when Aunt Fanny said, not at all regretfully, "I must think of my old friend. Indeed, I am urging him to retire. I have developed, Eve, great respect, if not affection, for Dr. Anstey. He offered to leave care of my body to Dr. Bishop. I told him that I could no longer impose on the kindness of a gallant veteran."

"Dr. Bishop, I hope, appreciates your thoughtfulness."

"He has assured me that he does."

Anstey took Eve over his nursing-home and into his laboratory. His quiet enthusiasm set her wits to work and quickened enthusiasm in her too active mind. She wondered if enthusiasm for anything was the greater if suppressed. Inevitably, she compared Anstey with Quentin. The latter was at his best when he spoke of his work in the parish, his contacts with his humblest parishioners. Eve found out that it was more fun to talk to Mrs. Tagg and Ellen than to ladies cut to the Wilmot pattern. When she mentioned this notable discovery to Uncle Quint he agreed with her, adding one comment: "And one learns more, Eve." This threw a spotlight on Mrs. Tagg, who was indeed a superior person inasmuch as she confronted drudgery with fortitude and a smile. Anstey said little about his work; and at first Eve felt intimidated by his reserves of speech. However, her warm interest in others would have melted an iceberg. She dared not question Anstey about his research work, because the Matron of the Home had told her that research work had to be secret work. Matron was a capable, not too prepossessing woman, Second in Command at *White House*, a past-pluperfect judge of character. Eve learnt this from one of the nurses, a jolly girl like herself.

"Matron, Miss Golightly, knows her job from A to Z. Difficult to please, she is. I don't mind telling you that it's harder to get in here than into the County Hospital. We call her Gimlet-eyes. And, mind you, she works harder than anyone else barring the Chief, and he, poor dear, is overworking himself—killing himself, I say."

"What a horrible thought!"

"Thought? We all say so."

Eve decided that she, as an outsider, might rush in where nurses feared to tread. Soon after Mrs. Crampton was able to leave her bed, Anstey appeared to be more human. He no longer disdained a chat with his patient's day nurse. Her opportunity came when he was alone with her in the corridor outside Mrs. Crampton's bedroom.

"I shall not come tomorrow, Miss Golightly. Keep our patient quiet. She must make haste slowly. I ought," he lifted the brow which was higher than the other, "to share my fees with you; our patient owes much to you."

Eve hoped she was not blushing. This was approbation from Sir Hubert Stanley.

"I owe much more to her," she replied.

Their eyes met.

"Are you," he asked, "one of the few who repay such debts? I'm sure you are. In a day or two your duties will be over. You have worked well."

"It wasn't a duty to me, Doctor, I—I believe I liked doing the little I could for Aunt Frances. Do you ever take a rest from your work?"

"Why do you ask that?"

"B-b-because I've a hunch you overwork."

He laughed.

She had never heard him laugh. He ceased to be a doctor; he became a man.

"Why do you laugh?"

"Because you're Echo. She was a nymph. And you repeat what I know to be false. Did Titian overwork? He painted when he was long past ninety. Did Gladstone overwork? Congenial work is play—*play*," he squared his shoulders, "and rejuvenation."

"Rejuvenation?"

"If I tell you something will you keep it to yourself?" She nodded. "That," he lowered his voice, "is what I'm after. Our span of life should be doubled. Why did Old Parr live to be a hundred and thirty-five? Why did he keep his faculties to the last. If—if I could find that out . . ."

He said no more. Milly was in the hall below. He had no car: a taxi was at the front door. Eve stood still, the victim of unsatisfied curiosities. "He let himself rip," she thought. "And he talked to me confidentially. Maybe he'll do it again." Greatly heartened, she went back to Aunt Frances.

## 7

This talk had taken place before Eve set eyes on the laboratory, where (so her imagination told her) youth was attempting to defy age. That, she reflected, went on all the time. Uncle Quint was the *antagonist* of the late Prebendary Leigh; Dr. Anstey she vaguely discerned as David confronting an aged Goliath, Dr. Bishop. . . . Anyway, both men were fighters. They loved a fight; gloried in it. She would like to ask Dr. Anstey if it wasn't more practical to prevent young people from growing old too soon rather than to make old people young again, if such a miracle were possible. Her thoughts wandered farther afield. A parson and a doctor were the Great Twin Brethren. The care of the soul ought to be linked up with the care of the body. She must have more talk with Dr. Anstey. . . .

She had instead an enlightening lecture from Miss Poindexter. Youth and Age had tea together in Mrs. Crampton's drawing-room. The Head had called to present her congratulations and best wishes. Eve, bubbling with excitement, had dwelt at length upon her own good fortune, after assuring her visitor that Aunt Frances was out of her dressing-gown and wearing her tweeds.

"I shall be rich some day; I'm rich now; I've a thousand pounds, and more of my very own, and next May I shall spend some of it."

"This is news indeed, Eve. Gather your roses, my dear, you have earned them. It has leaked out that your aunt was far more ill than my sister and I took her to be. Dr. Anstey must have our congratulations."

"Miss Poindexter, what do *you* make of him?"

"Really, Eve, were you ever my head girl? Try to express yourself less loosely. Dr. Anstey has made himself."

"Sorry, Head. I—I meant what is your opinion of him as a man?"

"Ah! He is, as a man, exceptional."

"So is Uncle Quint——"

"Uncle Quint?"

"Mr. Woodward."

"Yes, yes, of course, your stepfather. I had not forgotten that his Christian name was Quentin."

"That means the Fifth. He was a fifth son; he hadn't a farthing when he left Cambridge. Is he—exceptional?"

"He is, definitely so."

"He fought in the war, as you know. He's a fighter; so is Dr. Anstey. And so are you."

"Thank you, Eve; for your years you are observant."

"I want to be, but I'm only a beginner. Why, out of all the men I know, are these two exceptional?"

Miss Poindexter paused before she replied, glancing keenly and shrewdly at the youthful face so near her own. She had hoped that Eve was exceptional—but no. With a scholarship within her grasp, she had let it go. Eve had relinquished a career.

"You are well named Eve. Can I satisfy your curiosity on a theme that baffles the sages? You don't know many men. For that matter, nor do I. But I have a profound distrust of the crowd, almost invariably wrong. The *vox populi* is assuredly not the *vox dei*. Women, perhaps, know that better than men, although as George Eliot pointed out, if God made women fools, He made them to match the men. We're Christians, dear."

"I often wonder if we are."

"I am rebuked."

"Oh, Head, I wasn't making this little talk personal," replied Eve.

"You and I believe in the essence of Christianity: the ultimate triumph of love, God's love for all of us. Grant that and we can approach Him with a nicer understanding of Ways that appear inscrutable. Why are certain men and women exceptional? How comes it that they are able to purge themselves of selfishness? You have mentioned two men who are, I believe, outstandingly unselfish. They belong to the Elect. They don't merely preach Christ's gospel; they practise it. Is it, I ask, a strain on common sense to suggest humbly that such exemplars are designedly sent to a bewildered world to remind us that the greatest Exemplar of all time once walked and taught by the Sea of Galilee? May I ask for another cup of your excellent tea?"

This might be anticlimax, but Eve took the hint. Miss Poindexter had, she reflected, "spoken her piece"; the lecture was over.

As a successful schoolmistress Miss Poindexter had endeared herself to her pupils because, as a rule, she said too little rather than too much. She was indeed the *dea ex machina*. Nor, as

Eve well knew, did she waste advice on the unworthy. When she took leave of Eve, after spending a few minutes with Aunt Frances, she said graciously:

"We were sorry to lose you, but as Games Mistress you were hiding your talents under a tennis-net. You are clever enough but not old enough to serve under me. You"—she spoke with conviction—"are exceptional."

A week later, Eve found herself in Anstey's laboratory. He was no longer intimidating.

"You wanted to see my plant. Here it is."

"It doesn't tell me much. And Dr. Bishop rubbed it in that it is impertinent to ask a doctor questions."

"About his treatment of a patient. You can ask what questions you like about my work here."

"Then I will. You intrigued me tremendously. You want to prolong life, you said."

"I do."

"That's your apple."

She had to explain what she meant. He was quick to understand her figure of speech. Then he tried to explain his apple-hunting for words which a girl could comprehend.

"If you asked Dr. Bishop why old people die, he would tell you that death came from hardening of the arteries, or high blood pressure, or heart failure. That is generally accepted. But there are cases of oldish persons recovering their eyesight, renewing the colour of their greying hair, and, almost inexplicably, enjoying a fresh lease of life. Why should this happen? That is what is puzzling many research workers. It may be a question of diet. I—I think it is. Sugar, for instance, is poison to a diabetic——"

"I know that."

"I spare you medical terminology. There are cells in all of us which are termed 'tissue-connecting'. These cells make a sort of co-operative society out of our insides——"

"This is thrilling."

"It thrills me. Now, if these cells don't co-operate, we die. That's the problem which may be definitely solved within a year or two. Non-co-operation, if you can follow me, causes thickening of the arteries and so forth. Supply the cells with the food they need and they get to work again. I, and others, am trying to find that food."

"How madly exciting!"

"I find it so."

"But you look so cool and calm. Has the food a name?"

"Not yet. It is, or will be, a serum."

"It's a sin against the spirit to keep you from your splendid work. I'm ever so grateful. I shall remember this talk as long as I live. I have to get some food. I do wish you," she added fervently, "the best of luck."

## CHAPTER TWELVE

### I

EVE HAD NO MORE TALKS WITH ANSTEY TILL AFTER CHRISTMAS. She looked up to him as a girl living in Zermatt might glance at the grim Matterhorn. He excited her head, not her heart. He was a sealed fountain of information. A few sparkling drops had trickled out of his firm mouth, not enough to slake thirst. If Dr. Bishop retired, would Dr. Anstey take his practice? Quentin pooh-poohed such a possibility. Mrs. Tagg had something to say:

"I've 'eard tell of this Dr. Hanstey, Miss. 'E ain't like Dr. Bishop. Ho, no! 'E don't bring babies into the world an' push ole women hout of it. 'Is nursin' 'ome ain't a maternity 'ome. It's chock-a-block with old 'uns."

"Dr. Anstey saved the life of my aunt."

"Yus; that's the talk in village."

Eve remained at *The Gables* till the New Year. Mrs. Crampton made preparations to celebrate the greatest Feast in Christendom. The newly-wedded pair were invited to dine with her and Eve.

"That means," said Aunt Frances, not too cheerfully, "one man, two middle-aged women and a young girl. Can you think of a lively young bachelor who might be coaxed to join us?"

Eve thought of the Beetle. Aunt Fanny had shaken hands with him. More, she had approved his taking Eve to lunch at the *Hind's Head*. It had been a memorable luncheon, not spoilt by love-making. Two pals had enjoyed the best of wine and food.

"There's the Beetle, Auntie."

"Tch! Lord Claud to me, please. Yes, yes, he could turn a funeral into a wedding. Ask him to join us."

"I quite forgot; he's spending Christmas at Beaumanoir."

"A noble name. Well, well, you must think of somebody else. We couldn't invite Evan Vallance without his lackadaisical

Mamma. Colonel Wilmot would come by himself, but his tiresome wife would never speak to me again."

"What a brain-wave! Ask him."

"No; I refuse to quarrel with my neighbours."

"I've a brain-wave. Ask Dr. Anstey."

"To be sure. Dreadful to think of him keeping Christmas alone. I'll invite him tomorrow."

It was now early in December. Mrs. Crampton had decided to give Eve an apple, a small car. She had taken Colonel Wilmot into her confidence; he commended a Riley, with the new synchromesh gear. He offered to teach Eve how to drive his car. Accordingly, Aunt Fanny had great pleasure in telling a devoted niece what surprise was in store. On Christmas Day she would find a small car in her stocking, and, after the Colonel's coaching, would be able to drive it.

"Auntie! What a present! I shan't forget to hang up my stocking." She hugged her aunt, and danced round the room. "My luck is too good to last. Tap wood!" She tapped her head. "I make one condition——"

"Condition? Tch!"

"It must be a birthday and Christmas present. I shall be nineteen on the 13th of February."

"Very good. It never occurred to me before, but you were in too great a hurry to join US. Had you tarried twenty-four hours, you would have been a Valentine."

Dr. Anstey accepted the invitation. He had not seen his patient for three weeks, neither had he seen Eve, much to her disappointment. Three times she had carried fresh eggs to the Nursing Home, a grant-in-aid which Matron acknowledged. More disappointment awaited Miss Golightly.

"Has Dr. Anstey an assistant in his laboratory?" she asked.

"No; now and again one of the nurses helps him."

"Do you think, Matron, that he would take me on as a probationer? Not at once, but later."

"I'm positive he wouldn't. You'd look charming in a nurse's kit, but you have no experience."

"It was a blind shot," Eve admitted. "I can hit a typewriter—I've a Corona of my own—I could do secretarial work. But I see it's a wash-out."

It was. Woman, even more than man, is born to disappointment. However, Eve was philosophical. She had plenty to do, and did it. Life was good. And, as Quentin said, a giver was a getter, if he or she gave what they could give joyfully.



The Woodward planned to move to *Meadowsweet* after the New Year. Two empty attics were papered and furnished. In the back garden, the Vicar would have one large room, on which builders were at work. Mrs. Tagg paid Sybil a compliment.

"I'll stay on till nine, yus, I will. My eldest gal can do 'er bit, 'igh time she did. You can't demean yerself, M'm, by 'avin' 'igh tea 'stead o' late dinner. 'Twouldn't be seemly."

Ellen offered to double her hours of work if her "celery" was doubled. . . .

In her bath, Eve patted herself. "I may be fat one day," she reflected. "If my head gets fat, I shall stick it into a gas-oven." At the beginning of Yuletide her attention was arrested by an article in a Sunday newspaper written for adolescents. It was entitled "Petting and Petting Parties". "Apt alliteration's artful aid." The writer, a doctor (possibly a woman doctor), had questioned one hundred young men and girls. He prefaced his theme by stating his conviction that he was dealing with matters of importance which parents withheld from their children. Under the caption was a presumably editorial note: "This article should be read and digested by all young people over sixteen years of age." It dealt with continence, light petting and heavy petting. What the writer meant by "heavy" petting puzzled Eve. She assumed that a kiss was "light" petting. This "Gallup" poll dismayed her. Sixty-nine of the youthful voters were in favour of light petting. Only eleven voted for heavy petting, whatever that might be. Eve, annoyed to find herself uncomfortably warm, decided not to show the article to her mother. Indeed, she burnt the paper. The moral, left unwritten, was obvious. If young people played with fire, they would be scorched. Three-fourths of the article dealt with continency. Incontinence was pilloried as the taproot of unhappy marriages. What upset Eve was the writer's assumption that most young people were incontinent, enough to upset any *virgo intacta*. Finally she consoled herself with the conclusion that a nasty-minded man was the author. Long afterwards she learnt that it had been written by a woman, who discreetly put initials in front of a name unfamiliar to most of her young readers.

One drop of milk will cloud a glass of fair water. This article had poison in it. Eve, however, supplied the antidote. She, at any rate, was not interested in light or heavy petting. But—

such a bothering "but"—if a lot of girls, a round fifty of them, could give their half-baked opinions on such a blush-provoking subject, why was she so different from them? She had been warned by Mim to take care of her thoughts. She had done so. She could have a talk with Mim. Mim would go up in coloured sparks. . . .

She rejoiced over one happy thought. The Beetle, who was an advocate of light petting, had never tried to kiss her.

## 3

The Christmas dinner at *The Gables* was a feast. Aunt Fanny soared to heights.

"I want this dinner," she said, "to be something you'll all remember. Everybody in the kingdom will be gorging themselves with turkey, plum pudding and mince pies. I have had a word with my Colonel. He was so pleased with ME that he offered to kiss me under the mistletoe, and I nearly told him to do it. The dear man is honest. He said that Mrs. Wilnot would give up the ghost if he asked her to alter the traditional bill of fare. He wrote down what he would like to have at *The Towers*. He offered to dine with us! How he loves his jokes . . . He made me laugh. He said—I didn't take him seriously—that if he dined with us, his wife would divorce him and it might be an opportunity to regain his freedom. Listen! Oysters or caviare, or both. Clear turtle. No fish. Pheasant Edouard Sept."

"Sounds a royal dish, Auntie."

"It is. Two pheasants will suffice for five persons. You bone the bird, and stuff it with *foie-gras*, chopped almonds and pistachio."

"Auntie? Higgins can't cope with that."

"She can't. But the Colonel knows a restaurant which is famous for this particular dish. They will bone the pheasants, stuff them, and send them here on Christmas Eve. We shall braise the birds and make the sauce, a champagne sauce with sliced truffles."

"Gosh!"

"Child!"

"I'm sorry. I should have said 'By my halidome', or 'Odd-zooks'."

"After this royal dish the Colonel suggests a plain cream ice flavoured with maraschino, and served with a hot sauce of

maraschino cherries, which I can get at Fortnum's. After that a Stilton cheese for the men."

"We shall remember your feast as long as we live."

"I have bought a present for the Colonel, a box of cigars from his tobacconist."

Eve glanced at Uncle Tom's portrait.

"Uncle Tom," she murmured, "is smiling at us."

A good dinner is seldom wasted on man or woman accustomed to frugal fare. Mrs. Crampton's guests were no exception. They ate, they drank, they made merry. Dr. Anstey "paid his shot". It would be exaggeration to affirm that he was the life and soul of the party, but he became human. He sat next to Eve, he clinked glasses with her when the Merry Widow presented herself after Bristol cream had been served with the turtle soup.

"A long life and a merry one. Here's champagne to our real friends and real pain to our sham friends."

Eve dared to whisper, "Are you thinking of Dr. Bishop?"

"You naughty girl, you ought to be spanked."

She tried in vain not to giggle. The others were talking about the move to the cottage, so Eve murmured:

"You might call me by my Christian name."

"I could not ask you to call me by mine."

"I don't know yours."

To her amusement he said dourly:

"I have a detestable name given to me by my mother who cherished hopes that my godfather, who had the same name, would make provision for me. He presented me with a silver spoon, nothing more. My name is Clarence."

"How awful!"

"Isn't it? A Duke of Clarence was drowned in a butt of Malmsey. They hushed it up at the time. Of course, he committed suicide."

This statement broke the ice. Anstey hoped that Eve would call him Larry, if she could nerve herself to do so. By this time a doctor and a parson had become mere men. After dinner, Aunt Fanny and her guests sat down in the hall facing a yule log which burned with brighter flame because holes had been bored into it. Milly had poured paraffin into the holes. Mrs. Crampton, rejuvenated by good food and good company, said gaily:

"Always we sat beside a yule log when we were children and stories were told. Somebody must tell a story. I call upon Dr. Anstey."

"Auntie is brave," Eve reflected. "Why didn't she call on Uncle Quint?"

Anstey protested:

"Mr. Woodward is a popular *raconteur* in Limpley," he murmured.

Quentin laughed, saying:

"Mrs. Crampton, Anstey, has heard my yarns many times."

Eve felt oddly nervous, questioning her aunt's discretion. At Mrs. Wilmot's too-formal luncheons, when talk hung heavy, the hostess would address her husband: "Now, dear, tell us one of your funny stories." On such mournful occasions, Eve, in the Colonel's place, would have said: "I'll have a shot at it, if you'll leave the room and go to blazes." This, she reflected, might spoil a jolly party, if Clarence refused to oblige or, worse, if he told his story badly. However, he warmed his hands at the fire and smiled.

"Must it be a true story?" he asked his hostess.

"A personal experience, I suggest."

Eve blinked. Clarence was looking slyly at her. Had he winked at her? Larry, conceivably, might wink, not Clarence. On the other hand, Clarence in defence of his devastating pagan name might have decided to show her that he could rise above such a paralysing disability.

"I take it," he began, "that I'm asked to spin a yarn for children?"

"Yes, yes," Aunt Fanny assured him. "I, for one, my dear man, am a child again."

"If I introduce a side branch of my profession, I shall be forgiven?"

"Certainly."

"Thanks. Once upon a time, I was in San Francisco, which may mildly interest a lady whose name is Frances. Near San Francisco is the *Cliff House*, where seals attract trippers. Between the city and the *Cliff House* lies the magnificent Golden Gate Park. The City Fathers decided that a seal pond would be a Lido for the children. The seals in the pond soon became tame. And then, to the dismay of everybody, some of the seals died. I—I"—his eyes rested on Eve's face—"was invited to perform an autopsy on one. I found out the cause of death—chewing-gum. Gum, as you know, can be chewed with impunity; it must not be swallowed."

"I know," said Eve, as he paused. "Girls can chew gum, park it on the arm of a chair, and chew it again."

"I have one interested listener," said Anstey. He went on gravely: "I am sorry to tell you that thoughtless young women chewed gum when they were watching the seals at play and threw the gum into the pond instead of parking it in the Park. So a notice was put up asking visitors not to throw gum into the pond. I was watching the seals, when a young lady sauntered up, chewing gum. She pointed a finger at the notice: 'That,' she said to me, as she chewed her gum, 'gets my goat. Seals love chewing gum. Look at that old seal on the rock. He's chewing gum, bless him!' Children"—Anstey glanced at his hostess—"the old seal *was* chewing gum."

"I don't believe it," said Eve. "Seals haven't teeth."

"True," sighed Anstey. "And yet I saw that seal chewing gum; I saw him get rid of it. He didn't swallow it. He parked it on the rock. As a doctor this interested me. The keeper of the seals at my request caught the old fellow and made him open his mouth. He had a perfect set of teeth."

Aunt Fanny appeared to be impressed. A doctor was speaking positively.

"Most remarkable," said Quentin. "You examined his teeth?"

"There and then. I was confounded. The truth came to light almost immediately. The keeper had been asked the day before to help the wife of a millionaire to find her dentures. They were not found. She was a chewer of gum; she had not read the notice. She admitted to the keeper that she had thrown her gum into the pond and, inadvertently, she had thrown with it her dentures. The old seal got 'em."

All laughed except Anstey.

"Capital yarn," said Quentin. "I can't cap it."

"I can," Eve affirmed. She spoke, mimicking Anstey's quiet voice. "Yes, children, it's my duty as a lover of truth to tell you that Dr. Anstey told me he wanted to visit America because he'd never been there."

"I never have," Anstey admitted.

4

Eve called her small car *The Riley Pippin*. Cheap transport establishes fresh contacts. Eve became increasingly friendly with Matron. Her car was at the doctor's disposal, but why didn't he have a car of his own? Matron explained the reason. He was not a G.P., but a consultant. Patients came to him;

seldom did he go to them. Why, Eve asked, didn't he play golf or tennis? Because he spent what leisure he had in the laboratory. None the less, after the move was made from the Vicarage to *Meadowsweet*, Anstey came now and again to the cottage. But, exasperatingly, he boxed himself up with Quentin in his room. Eve was seldom invited to join the two men. Quentin sang his praises.

"That Christmas dinner," he told Eve, "was an eye-opener. Anstey hasn't, as I stupidly supposed, a one-track mind. I'm proud to call him my friend."

"Uncle Quint, is he a man's man?"

"There's no such a person."

"You know what I mean——"

"No daughter of Eve means what she says. Colonel Wilmot might be called a man's man, but he pays flattering attentions to women. If there is a man's man hereabouts it's Evan Vallance."

"You do say odd things."

"I say what I mean. Young Evan is engrossed with himself. Has he asked you to marry him?"

"If he did, he'd have to be engrossed with himself: I shouldn't leave him a leg to stand on."

Spring danced upon the Surrey hills. The oak was out before the ash. The sap rose in Eve, vaguely conscious of its uprising. Curves took the place of lines. Jim Golightly, had he been alive, might have exclaimed, "Thank God she is an outdoor girl." She worked in the garden, where the lawn had been enlarged to make a tennis court; she played golf; she did her duty in Limpley. Sybil watched over her activities not too serenely.

"I hope it's all right," she said to Quentin, "but it worries me that she seems to be all-sufficing to herself."

"She isn't, rather the contrary. Before she was born did you long for a man-child?"

"Quint, I did."

"There you are. I shall have a word with Anstey about this. Till now she's been more a boy than girl, full of a lively boy's pep and push."

"Do you see her as Mademoiselle Nitouche?"

"I detect no 'come hither' in her eye. She's changed lately, more womanly. When she talks about her apples, I have no fear that she's after forbidden fruit. Her big apple at the moment is friendship, particularly friendship with men older than herself. I've never seen her flirt with any man; and it would be a brave man who attempted familiarities with her. Actæon hasn't

appeared. We may have a surprise when he does. Eve is a mixer, quite at her ease, you told me, in the seats of the mighty, just the same with Ellen and Mrs. Tagg. Don't worry; whether she's happy because she's healthy, or healthy because she's happy, is another question to ask Anstey."

## 5

Early in May, Eve found herself in and of Mayfair. She was presented at Court. Again, any recital of doings so familiar to everybody would be boring. She did what every well-born maiden does as a matter of routine. The joywheel failed to make her giddy. Often she whirled herself off it. She achieved, so Uncle Alaric declared, a *succès d'estime*: middle-aged, distinguished gentlemen liked to talk to her; she liked to talk to them. Younger men appeared to be shy of her. Her hostess said frankly: "You can't have it both ways. Brain appeals to you more than muscle." Her friendship with the Beetle was taken for granted. He spoke of himself as the Slave of the Lamp. "I'm only a nightlight," Eve told him. She wrote to her mother:

*Darling Mum,*

*Your lamb is frisking. If I told you what I did from high noon till long after midnight, you would have to take a rest cure. But I keep fit. Uncle Alaric couldn't be kinder to me if I were his own daughter. I have more cousins than I can count. The Beetle and I are brother and sister. The boys give me a miss. That doesn't bother me a bit. You won't believe it, but not one of the girls I know has been over the Tower of London. Uncle Alaric took me, and we had such fun. We looked at the Crown Jewels. In a vitrine were the Insignia of the Garter with an old Beefeater on guard. He thought Uncle Alaric was a tripper. We had been to Madame Tussaud's. Charles I was wearing the garter, a pale blue riband across his chest (as they do now), not round his neck as they did then. This annoyed Uncle Alaric. At the Tower, we saw only one riband, a darkish blue. So Uncle A. said that King Edward had changed the colour. The old Beefeater scowled at him. "This," he said, "is the Garter. It's always been this shade of blue." Uncle A. said very mildly: "I think you are mistaken; it was once pale blue." The old lad boiled over. "And who are you, my good man, to teach me my business?" I believe that Uncle A. would have let it go at that, but I couldn't stick it. So I said as grandly as*

*I could: "This good man, Mr. Beefeater, is the Earl of Flamborough, and very nearly the senior Knight of the Garter." Mum, how I wish you'd been there! The old lad brazened it out. "Yus," he said, purple in the face, "and I'm Rajah Brooke of Borneo." Uncle A. was immensely pleased with him. He fished out a pound note. "Dare I offer this to a rajah?" Well, the old lad must have realised that he'd made a bloomer. He took the note, saying abjectly: "I beg pardon, my lord, my mistake."*

*I loved Hampton Court Palace. The Beetle took me to the Zoo. It was packed; we didn't see a soul we knew. Uncle A. and I are seeing all the sights. He had two "wins" at Ascot. He is going to name a promising filly—Eve.*

*Now and again I have a queer urge to get away by myself, which I've never done. Do you think I could get on with myself? Then I might find out more about myself.*

*Much love to both of you,*

*Your own,  
Eve.*

Later on, Sybil had good reason to recall her daughter's urge to be by herself.

After the Eton and Harrow match at Lord's, Miss Golightly returned to the cottage. She brought with her, as a present to her mother, a charcoal sketch of herself.

"Is it really like me?" she asked.

"It is you," Quentin replied.

The artist was an impassioned student of character. The sketch might have been made by John Sargent. On the following day Anstey came to tea. The drawing was shown to him.

"Do you like it?" Eve asked.

"It's very good," he muttered.

"Larry, I didn't ask you if it was good. Do you like it?"

"M'm. . . . He's clapped about two years on to your age. I find it—how shall I put it?—not—not exactly defiant, but a thought devil-may-care."

"You're wonderful. That's just how it strikes me. It isn't me as I am, but me as I might be if—if things went wrong."

He assumed the expression now familiar to her of the research worker.

"Have you ever prepared yourself for ill fortune?"

"Never. All the same, since I saw you last I have found out that things do go frightfully wrong with girls. Maybe I was thinking of one case when I sat for this sketch."



"Tell me."

"It happened to a girl not unlike me. She is one of my innumerable distant cousins. Her people, I won't tell you their names, are swells. I liked her. Just before Ascot she vanished."

"Vanished?"

"Absolutely. Her people were crazy with misery. She left no letter behind her. She packed up a suit-case, stepped into a taxi, and, I say it again, vanished. I tell you London was combed by the police. And a fortnight ago she was found in a small flat in Pimlico, alone."

"You thrill me, Eve."

They were together on the lawn. Quentin had gone to the village; Sybil was in the cottage. It is likely that Eve would have been less frank had her mother been present. She went on:

"The girl, she is about my age, had been living alone, but a man came to see her, a married man. That was hushed up. The man died in her flat."

"Good God!"

"He had heart disease. The girl didn't lose her head. She rang up a man I know, the sort of man I'd ring up if I were in a hole."

She paused, tempted to tell Anstey that the Beetle had been summoned. But the Beetle didn't know that she knew.

"Don't tell me any names," Anstey said.

"I won't. The man was marvellous. He came at once. Luckily, he came in his own car, and it was latish, nearly midnight. He and the girl got the dead man into his car. He drove off to some big hospital, telling the girl to go to bed. She did. What a night she must have had! At the hospital, the man's story was accepted as true. He lied magnificently. He said that he and his friend had been together when the seizure began. He got him into his car and in the car he died."

Anstey looked incredulous.

"The authorities at the hospital accepted this story as true?"

"Well, I—I don't know. But both men were so well known, both had handles to their names."

"Do you happen to know the name of the hospital?"

"Yes, I do, but I shall keep it to myself."

"Quite right. Carry on."

"The girl went back to her people. The dead man's widow doesn't know the truth. The papers said that her husband had died in his friend's car. I tell you it was hushed up."

"Then how did you come to hear it?"

"If you must know, the girl told me."

"Did she pledge you to secrecy?"

"No; she was sure I'd keep the dreadful truth to myself."

"But you've told me."

"Nobody else; I told you because I can trust you and because you are the only man I know who can explain something which bothers me terribly. This distant cousin of mine was not a heartless beast. She loved her people. Of course she loved this man more, and she wanted to screen him."

"Was the man much older than she was?"

"Yes. You won't try to find out who he was?"

"On my honour I won't. You ask me, as a doctor"—she nodded—"to explain her vanishing without a word to her people? I am not a psychologist. You've answered your own question. Her love for her man was greater than her love for her parents. Did they forgive her?"

"Yes; if they hadn't she would have killed herself."

"It's a poignant story. Poignant to me because she was your kinswoman. Why didn't you tell it to your mother or your step-father?"

"It would upset Mum that I should know such a story. Uncle Quint is a parson. I'm dreadfully afraid he would have no sympathy at all with a young girl who—who broke the Seventh Commandment."

"You know them better than I do. Why do you think that I should feel sympathy for her?"

"Because you're a doctor."

His left eyebrow shot up; his eyes rested keenly on hers.

"No. Think again."

She accepted the challenge.

"Because," she went on hesitatingly, "in your work you—you find, or—or you expect to find laws, long established laws, which are not laws. You told me that old people didn't die of thickening of the arteries and heart failure, but of something deeper, something which causes such troubles."

He was surprised and pleased.

"Thank you for remembering so well what I said. I dare say a young girl's conscience can be—well, thickened—*indurated* by something physical which might escape the cognizance of a parson."

"I hoped you would say something like that."

"What do you think made this cousin break a Commandment?"

"She doesn't believe in God, so perhaps she doesn't believe in His Commandments."

"And yet she is a friend of yours?"

To her relief she detected no censure in his voice. He was, she reflected, what she had hoped to find him: not a judge, but a student of humanity, a seeker after the truth which lies under ordinary conventions and inhibitions.

"I am so sorry for her, the more so because as a child I felt as she did."

"As a child?"

"She lost a brother. She adored him. He was badly wounded just before the war ended. He came home to die, but he didn't die. He lingered on; he suffered horribly. She was only ten . . . I was ten when I lost my father. . . . I thought God was cruel to me, but I had faith in Him, faith that my father would come back, but I missed him so. Her faith in God has come back, because He has saved her."

Anstey was not unmoved. It may have been a dramatic moment for him, because she spoke as serenely as her mother did. Dared he tell her that he knew the name of the *man* who had saved her friend? He had read in some paper that Lord Claud Beaumanoir had taken a celebrity, a famous barrister, to the Westminster Hospital, where on arrival he stated that his friend had died in his car. Little more than a paragraph, but at the time Anstey had wondered if details had been withheld from the general public.

"Eve——"

"Yes, Larry?"

"I know the names of the two men, that's all. I don't know, and I shall make no attempt to find out, the name of your cousin. You can trust me. As you say, things go frightfully wrong with many of us."

"Would you have done what my friend did?"

"I hope so; he saved an appalling situation. Put this sad experience from you. I hope it has not discoloured your mind."

"I can't swear it hasn't. I'm trying to make excuses for the girl. The man was twice her age, so clever, so brilliant. He had no home life; his wife—I've met her—is a doll; they had no children. Veronica was—— Oh-h-h! her name has slipped out."

"It conveys nothing to me. Go on."

"She was so sorry for him, she wanted to give him what he had never had."

"All is said, Eve. I—understand. Apart from this, you enjoyed your stay in London?"

"I did, but I'm glad to be home again."

"Did you meet any of your mother's relations?"

She laughed.

"Of course I did. They were a bit stuffy and sniffy. I hate to say it, but they've never quite forgiven Mum for marrying a Golightly. They looked at me—*me*, as if I were on the road to ruin. What was written by Rudyard Kipling about East and West?"

"Never the twain shall meet."

"He might have told us that West and South-West do meet in London and don't kiss. What a beast I am! I've not asked you about your work in the lab. Are you going to be the Great Rejuvenator?"

"Bar chaff—it rejuvenates me to talk to you. In the lab, I'm hung up. Out of the lab, I feel bucked. I've supplied an old seal with dentures."

"Worked another miracle?"

"The seal thinks so. Do you know anything about pernicious anaemia?"

"Colonel Wilmot says his wife has it."

"Till quite recently pernicious anaemia was incurable. To-day it is curable. Whilst you were away, a middle-aged man came to my Home. He crawled in. Not in pain . . . he dragged one leg after the other. Last week he danced gaily off. He may make old bones."

"You must be pleased."

More might have been said, but Sybil joined them and, soon after, Anstey hurried back to Guildford.

6

The not too sunny summer of 1930 came to an end. Evan Vallance became a member of the Corps Diplomatique. On the strength of this creditable achievement, he asked Eve to become engaged to him. Sure of himself, not too sure of her, inasmuch as she had accorded him no encouragement, he composed a letter:

*Dearest Eve,*

*I do hope and pray that this won't upset you. You are the only girl for me. It's a dismal fact that an attaché can't marry*

*without the consent of his chief. But I can wait, if you can. Whilst you were in London I suffered torments!!! I should have died if I hadn't swatted night and day to pass my exam. I passed it, as you know, not far from the top of the list. I have a thousand a year of my own, apart from expectations. I want to give you, darling, a colossal proof of my love. If you care for me and can't wait for me, I'll chuck the Service and marry you before Christmas. Madre is willing to let us live with her. She thinks you the sweetest girl in the kingdom and you are.*

*Eve, I am not a bold Lochinvar. I should grovel, if I tried to say what is seething in my heart. I have asked myself why you came back to Limpley just the same as you went away? I have had, darling, a nightmare vision of you surrounded by your swains, all of them butterflies. Is it possible, I ask myself, that you did not yield to their importunities, because, hidden away in your innocent heart, was a fellow who is not a butterfly?*

*Don't answer this too hastily. Marriage is a solemn sacrament to  
Your devoted,  
Evan.*

Eve dealt with poor Evan kindly, almost maternally. She made—as he had done—at least three rough drafts of the letter she wrote to him. She told him, using considerate words, that he did not have an unborn puppy's chance of winning her. . . .

It is significant that, too coolly and calmly, she put a "poser" to herself. If a letter, less carefully phrased, had come from the Beetle, what reply would she have made to him?

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

### I

IT NEVER OCCURRED TO EVE THAT ANSTEY MIGHT FALL IN LOVE with her. He paid her no compliments: he talked to her as he talked to Quentin. Seldom did he talk of himself. Eve had found out that, as a rule, men did talk about themselves; and such talk coming from a clever man may be most enlightening. She had met the silver-tongued advocate who had died in Veronica's arms. He could talk about himself charmingly. Veronica had said to Eve, "Never did I think that he could ever be *my* man." After his death the lovelorn girl was incapable of answering questions. Veal sense was affronted. Why hadn't

the lover eloped with Veronica? His wife would have divorced him; smart Society would have condoned their offence; everybody loves a lover. The Beetle "put her wise", after Veronica told him that she had not been able to keep the truth from Eve.

She had it out with him after her talk with Anstey. My lord had returned to the parade-ground after slaying many grouse. He gave Eve another luncheon at the *Hind's Head*. Eve drank one third of a bottle of superlative 1921 Moselle, a Berncastel Auslese, potent to restore speech to a man dumb from birth.

As they were drinking their coffee, Eve said:

"Veronica told me what you'd done for her. I'm proud to be your pal."

The Beetle was indignant.

"She told you. B——y little fool! Now it will be all over the town."

"Ever so many thanks."

"You're close as a clam. But if she's told you, she'll tell other girls."

"Not she. I do wish you'd lift a pea-soup fog. Why didn't your friend go off with her?"

"He was never my friend. He was a selfish beast. She was infatuated . . . played ostrich . . . the police were bound to find her, but he hoped they wouldn't find him. If they did, they kept their mouths shut. Although able to make pots of money—and he spent every bob he did earn—he had married a big heiress. We know she made him wish he'd never been born, but he couldn't cut loose from *her* house in Portland Place and *her* house in Essex. Got it?"

"I have; and I don't want a second helping."

"Have a speck of old brandy?"

"You know I never touch it."

"What a lamb you still are! Here's mint sauce for you. Veronica was crazy. Not, perhaps, so crazy as you think. The little wench may have known that her people would find her, and then his hand would have been forced. He deserved what came to him."

"You were grand, Beetle."

"Well, honey, I say it as shouldn't. Once in a blue moon I answer the bell. I'm not going to compare myself with a sow's ear, but, in emergency cases, the old Norman blood boils up."

It simmered, as he went on to speak of his long leave, where he had been and what he had done.

"Your fiancée of three days has married an American."

"Aye. After our little cuddle-up, she said she would never marry an Englishman. How are you keeping, Baby-face?"

"I'm ten pounds heavier than I was last year."

"You ought to be about two pounds heavier than you were before lunch."

## 2

Eve was beginning to tell herself that nothing madly exciting would ever happen to a country lass. The tenor of her way could not be described as noiseless but it was tranquil. She had collected many small apples; she had eaten them with gusto.

Early in October, she was returning from the golf-course on foot, when she espied a man near the wicket-gate, apparently staring at the cottage. She took him to be a stranger. By this time, the garden, apart from the house, held attractions: a pergola, a herbaceous border, a lily pool. It richly rewarded Sybil when foot passengers could be seen from the parlour window smiling at her work.

The man stood aside when Eve reached the gate and he had the politeness to open it for her. He looked, on close inspection, old, gaunt and thin, dressed in much-worn tweeds. She could make little of his face, because he was bearded and wore dark spectacles.

"Thank you," Eve said. "I hope you were admiring our cottage?"

"I was."

He had the voice of a gentleman, but weak and husky.

"It isn't an old cottage, just a reproduction."

"You are *Miss* Golightly?"

"Yes."

She thought he laid emphasis on the "Miss". He went on in a tired voice.

"I recognised you from a portrait in *The Tatler*, which I saw in New York; you were a bridesmaid at a fashionable wedding."

Eve was justified in leaping to the conclusion that the speaker was an American, not an Englishman; she could detect a slight nasal drawl. And his tweeds, she was sure, had not been cut by an English tailor. She was in no hurry; she had drunk tea at the golf-house with Colonel Wilmot. Twilight was coming on; it had been a warm, sunny day.

"You are an American gentleman?" she asked.

"I'm an American."

He lifted his cap and was moving on, limping a little.

"Are you staying in the village?" she asked.

"In Guildford."

"You aren't walking back to Guildford?"

"Yes."

"I can give you a lift. I have to dash into Guildford to get some fish for dinner. I shan't be five minutes. Won't you come into the house and sit down?"

He hesitated, putting a hand to his beard. She noticed that the hand was seared and scarred, but it looked like the hand of a middle-aged man; it trembled. Was he afflicted with palsy?

"Very kind of you," he murmured. "I'd sooner stand here and look at *your* pretty cottage."

"It's my mother's. She would give you a cup of tea, if you'll come in."

"I—I couldn't put Mrs. Woodward to that trouble."

"You know that my mother is Mrs. Woodward?"

Again he hesitated. His slight American accent became more pronounced.

"It's this way. I'm only in Guildford for a couple o' days. I kinda took a notion to look at the Hog's Back. I passed your cottage. I thought it a peach. So I asked a woman in that cottage next yours if it was an old cottage; she said it wasn't. She said that the vicar of the parish, Mr. Woodward, had married your mother, Mrs. Golightly, and that her daughter lived with her."

"I see. I'll hurry up. You look so tired."

She sped up the flagged path and into the small garage behind the cottage.

### 3

The man rolled a cigarette. Before Eve rejoined him, he took from his pocket a folded sheet of paper, glanced at it, nodded his head, and put it back in his pocket. Had Eve been looking over his shoulder, she would have seen that it was *The Tatler* portrait of herself.

Long afterwards, she wondered why she drove so slowly into Guildford, not ten minutes distant. Why, from the first, had she been interested in this stranger? Was it merely the ministering instinct? He looked dreadfully weak and infirm. . . .

He sat beside her.

"Where are you staying?" she asked.



He named one of the smaller hotels.

"I know where it is, Mr.—er——"

"Payson."

"Your hotel is not far from Dr. Anstey's house; he is a friend of mine."

"I haven't much use for doctors," he drawled indifferently. "Most of 'em waste their time trying to keep folks alive who ought to be dead."

"You have a sense of humour, Mr. Payson."

"I had—once."

And then to her amazement he chuckled. She could have sworn that she had heard his chuckle before. But when—where? It may be impossible for any man to alter a chuckle, unless he has sustained an injury to his vocal cords.

"Is this your first visit to England?" she asked.

"My first and last."

A wave of pity swept through her. Did this poor stray know that his days were numbered?

"I'm afraid you don't like England?"

"It may be so; I don't say it is so. You can blame our primary schools. I know North and South America. We may like individual Englishmen, but most of us—I don't say I do—think John Bull a great big bully."

"Oh, dear!"

To her amazement he touched her, laid his scarred hand on her sleeve.

"Forgive me! I have distressed you. After your kindness I wouldn't do that for the world."

It might have been Uncle Alaric speaking, or Uncle Charlie. Nearly all the Golightly men she had known had a courteous intonation in their voices when they apologised. She said hurriedly:

"What you say interests me. Poor old John isn't a bully. At any rate, his colonies love him. Uncle Sam has no colonies to speak of. Here we are."

He left the small car, so did she. She held out her hand. He took it, and very gently pressed it.

"Good night, Mr. Payson."

"Good-bye, Miss Golightly."

He ascended four steps slowly and turned. No more words were exchanged. He lifted his right hand, and made a motion as if he were throwing an *adieu* to her. Eve saw the door close behind him. The farewell gesture was familiar. Vaguely she

recalled somebody who had used it. But who—who? She nearly returned to *Meadowsweet* without the fish. How extraordinary it was that this broken old man, evidently a gentleman, brought to mind Uncle Alaric!

## 4

She took the fish to Mrs. Tagg.

"Were you in your cottage about five today?"

"Yus, Miss, I was."

"Did a gentleman call in and ask questions about our cottage?"

"No gen'leman, Miss. A strynger, lookin' as if he'd just left an 'orsepital, made a noosance of 'isself when I was busy ironin'."

"An American?"

"Yes, Miss. 'E slipped a bob into me 'and. So I did answer 'is questchings."

"Did he ask many questions?"

"Yus. That's why I sez 'e's no gen'leman."

"You answered them?"

"I did. 'E seemed hinterested, casual-like."

"Americans do ask questions."

"'E spoke quiet-like, as if 'e was tired."

"I gave him a lift back to Guildford."

"You done yer good deed, Miss."

Eve went to her bedroom. She sat on the bed. Never had her wits been so alert or more befogged. Mrs. Tagg had talked with hundreds of American trippers. She could not possibly be mistaken. The stranger was an American. She recalled his chuckle, his last gesture. A flicker of light dazzled her. It wasn't Uncle Alaric's chuckle; it was—Daddy's. And that gesture? She closed her eyes. She was no longer on a bed, but in a bed. She was a child. Daddy was leaving her room after one of their talks. He stood in the doorway; he blew a kiss to her, kissing his fingers and throwing the kiss at her. . . .

On her dressing-table stood her father's photograph, the presentment of a laughing young man. Daddy, as she remembered him. Eve hurried to the dressing-table, snatched up the photograph and stared at it. She laid it down.

"It can't be," she whispered. "But his hands—his *hands*?"

She sat down, no longer mistress of herself. Dared she go to bed? She could plead a headache. . . . She examined her own hands. The slim fingers were not straight: the tips curved

backwards. She had been told by Aunt Fanny that this indicated too easy-going a disposition. Veals had straight fingers with spatulate tips. She had remembered what her aunt said. It amused her to glance at the finger-tips of other people. She had noticed that the thin fingers of Mr. Payson had turned back; and she had wondered if a too-easy-going disposition had brought him to his present pass.

She had put away the copy of *The Tatler* with her portrait in it. Where was it? In the letterpress what had been written about herself? She found the paper. A column had been allotted to Betty's wedding. She read two lines:

"Miss Golightly is the daughter of Mrs. Golightly, of *Meadowsweet*, near Guildford, and a cousin to the Earl of Flamborough, K G."

Mr. Payson had read these lines in New York, soon after the wedding, it might be presumed. Then he had known at the time that Mrs. Golightly was alive and noted her address. If—if her father had not died, if Mr. Payson were he, why had he not hastened home?

It is pertinent (possibly impertinent on the part of a man) to suggest that a woman is incapable of visualising a tragedy impersonally, if she is affected by it. Eve's thoughts were focussed on the possible resurrection from the dead of the man she had loved "best in the world". That had been a joke between them like the "apples". She could see his laughing face and hear his voice as he turned at the nursery door. "How much do you love me?" She would reply promptly, "Best in the world".

The "whys" and "wherefores" of his keeping away from wife and child she abandoned as unanswerable. If her father was within three miles of her, weak, ill, changed beyond recognition, he had come back to take a last look at herself. He had refused to go into the cottage—!

She had no headache. She had never felt more physically fit. If she slunk into bed, her mother's solicitude would be unbearable. She must face the pair at dinner, smile as usual, and play piquet or chess with Uncle Quint afterwards. . . .

## 5

With Sybil functioning as curate, her daughter had taken on the duties, not the drudgery, of household management. Uncle Quint seldom failed to express his appreciation of her efforts. His observant eyes took note of Eve's inability to play a part.

"Good of you to rush into Guildford to get the fish. Perhaps you were tired after playing badly, eh?"

"I was at the top of my form. The Colonel gave me a third; and I downed him at the sixteenth hole."

"Very good—for *him*."

"He's a splendid loser."

"So are you, Eve."

"Am I? I'd like to think so." She began crumbling her bread. Sybil glanced at her.

"Anything wrong, darling?"

"N-n-nothing. Why should there be?"

"You look, as Quint says, rather tired."

"I'm not tired, Mum." She attempted a feeble joke. "Nor is my bus. I must take it into Guildford tomorrow morning for an overhaul."

Quentin laughed.

"Her car comes first in her affections."

For the rest of the dinner she behaved much as usual, grateful to her Guardian Angel. He had inspired the fib about the car. If she spent the whole morning in Guildford this too happy pair would ask no questions. Still, it is likely that a successful effort to wean her mind from the impending sword made that mind tired when she went to bed.

Again she could not cope with the main issue, although convinced that Daddy had come back. He would leave Guildford to hide himself and—die! The instinct of the wounded animal to crawl away from the herd was paramount. He must not die alone. . . .

At about two in the morning she swallowed three aspirins and fell asleep.

Next morning a bath refreshed her. The inspiration from without came to her. Veronica had rung up the Beetle. For a moment, Eve had a vision of a resourceful young man racing to her. Before he could reach her Mr. Payson might have left Guildford. Could she go to Larry? Her vision of him was different. He would sit with an impassive face, saying nothing till she had finished. With him discussion would be futile. He would tell her what to do, if she demanded his help, and she would have to obey. Right! She would be guided by a miracle-monger. . . .

Fortune favoured her. Matron told her that Anstey was busy in the laboratory.

"Please tell him that it is a matter of importance."

Within a minute Matron came back.

"He'll see you; you know your way."

She found Anstey standing near a table with a microscope on it, wearing a white overall.

"What is this matter of importance?" he asked.

She lowered her voice.

"I—I believe, I'm almost sure, that my father is here in Guildford."

Without a word he went out of the room. As soon as he came back he threw his overall on to a chair and sat down close to her.

"I've given orders we are not to be disturbed," he began curtly. "Take your time, try to be calm, give me your reasons for supposing that something so utterly unexpected has happened. One moment. . . . Does anybody else know or suspect this?"

"Nobody. I had to come to you."

She told her incredible story badly, but not baldly. As she had foreseen, he listened without any betrayal of feeling. She laid stress upon the turned-back fingertips, the assumed American accent, his farewell gesture and *The Tatler* portrait.

"He was wearing dark spectacles?" Anstey said.

"If I saw his eyes, I should know for certain. He had blue eyes, nemophila blue, with short, dark lashes. His beard—Daddy was clean-shaven—is grey. Do lashes turn grey?"

"Very rarely."

He sat still, engrossed with his thoughts."

"Where is this Mr. Payson?"

"At the *Angel*, not a hundred yards away."

"You must see him without his spectacles."

"I—I must, I must. Then I shall know, but I know now. I feel it here," she laid a hand over her heart. "I—I went to bed last night, telling myself that I was mistaken. Before I fell asleep I knew he was here. I knew he was lying awake thinking of me. What is your name for that?"

"Telepathy."

"Yes—telepathy. He wants me and I must go to him. You'll think me selfish . . . I—I am . . . I can't think clearly of what this means to Mum and Uncle Quint."

"Quite natural. You loved your father?"

"I adored him, Larry. He wasn't a father; he was my playmate, and now he looks old enough to be my grandfather."

He saw tears in her eyes. He apprehended a breakdown, hysteria. One sympathetic word from him might provoke it.

"Before we go on, Eve, think of me for an instant as your doctor. Sit still . . . close your eyes . . . keep your hands quiet. I'll give you a small dose of bromide."

Without another word, he did so. She gulped it down. He laid a finger on her pulse.

"Thank you."

He spoke reassuringly:

"Your pulse is beating strongly. Give the bromide a chance. Stop thinking, if you can. I'll do the thinking."

She was plastic to his touch. How cool his fingers were! Her thoughts lingered on him. He, at any rate, could think. He did not sit down; he turned his back to her and put into a cupboard the phial that held the bromide. Eve opened her eyes when his watch clicked.

"It's half past ten. You say he looked terribly tired? If he lay awake, it is likely that he did not rise early. If he is thinking of leaving Guildford today, it is important that you should see him at once. I'll walk with you to the *Angel* and wait outside for you."

"If it is Daddy, he may refuse to see me."

"I've not overlooked that. If he's not your father, it is inconceivable that he would refuse to see a young lady who had been kind to him."

Eve grappled with this.

"I—I'm afraid he will refuse to see me."

"In that case, you will join me, and we shall *know* that Mr. Payson is Mr. Golightly."

Her eyes shone.

"How glad I am I came to you. Suppose he does see me?"

"M'm. . . . He wore dark spectacles . . . dark specs are not, as a rule, worn indoors. If he is still wearing them, exercise your wits. What excuse can you offer for calling on him?"

"You must find the excuse."

He took his handkerchief from his pocket, a silk one.

"This is unmarked. Say you found it in your car; ask him if it is his."

"Why haven't I your wits?" She took the handkerchief.

"If he takes it, I shall know that he is an American, shan't I?"

"Will you?" he muttered doubtfully.

"They take spoons as souvenirs."

He smiled grimly. Her humour had not forsaken her.

"If he takes it as a souvenir of you, he might be your father."

"Oh-h-h! Does anything ever escape you? What shall I do then?"

"An accomplished actress might be suddenly seized with faintness. If she swooned, a father might betray himself."

"I—I couldn't do it."

"I'm sure you couldn't. Now, let's get this over. If this man is your father, if he refuses to see you, I'll see him."

"You?"

"It will be quite easy for me to go to a stranger and tell him that you are greatly distressed because you have reason to believe that he is a friend whom you knew long ago. I can say, as your doctor, that you are, well, mentally upset. If he is Mr. Payson, he will satisfy me of that. If he is your father, who must have heard of the Hippocratic oath, he may own up and discuss the situation calmly with me."

"You think of everything. Come on."

She jumped up, afire with impatience.

6

The wife of the hotel proprietor knew Eve by sight.

"Mr. Payson is here," she said. "He told me last night that he was leaving us today. He had his breakfast in his room, but he's up by this time. What am I to tell him?"

"That Miss Golightly wishes to see him, if he can spare a couple of minutes."

"If you'll step into the little parlour back of the bar, you will have it to yourself."

Eve was ushered into the parlour, a snug little room, embellished with sporting prints. Here the good burghers (and their wives) sat at ease, when the adjoining bar was open, in a most respectable inn. A faint fragrance of tobacco and ale assailed Eve's nostrils. The window was shut; in a dog-grate, a fire was doing its best to go out.

She laid her handbag on a small table; in it was Anstey's handkerchief. She was now sure that Mr. Payson would remain in his bedroom. Into that bedroom in about ten minutes two men would be together; and one of them would have his way with the other.

The landlady came back.

"Mr. Payson's compliments, Miss, and he will be with you in a minute."

"I brought him here last night in my car. He left his handkerchief in it. He had walked to the Hog's Back to see the wonderful view. Americans gloat over our countryside——"

"He looks dreadfully ill."

She hurried out, hearing the voice of a maid calling her.

The bromide was doing its duty. Eve told herself that she must have been mistaken. It did not occur to her that Daddy might be as anxious to see her as she was to see him. Anyway, in five minutes Larry and she would be laughing together.

Mr. Payson came in, wearing his spectacles. He greeted his visitor courteously. As he entered the room, his hand went to the spectacles. Eve saw that they were the cheap article sold at the seaside, not fitting too well. She was standing; so was he. She took the handbag from the table and opened it.

Eve spoke lightly enough:

"I do my shopping in Guildford, Mr. Payson. This morning I found your handkerchief in my car. Here it is."

She held it out.

"Not mine. I'm old-fashioned . . . I never carry coloured handkerchiefs."

"Then it must belong to Colonel Wilmot; I was playing golf with him yesterday."

As she put the handkerchief back into the bag, he said indifferently:

"You play golf?"

"And tennis. I can't afford to hunt."

"Is that so?" he drawled. "Give me an outdoor girl every time. Yes, sir-r-r."

But his pronunciation of "girl" was Etonian: the "r" in it was barely audible. She recalled her father's letter. He had wanted her to grow into an outdoor girl. She was now helplessly befogged again. She must leave Mr. Payson. . . . Larry would have to find out this man's identity. She held out her hand.

"I'm so sorry I butted in——"

"But, say, it was sweet of you."

He took her hand. As he did so, she dropped the bag in her left hand. Did she do it deliberately? Let a woman answer that question. As he bent to pick it up, his spectacles fell off.

"Daddy——!"

She clung to him, kissing and hugging him.



## 7

Further dissembling was impossible. For a moment he was paralysed. Then he strained her to him, returning her kisses, murmuring her name:

"Eve . . . Eve . . . my own little Eve."

"Nothing matters, Daddy, you've come back. I always knew you would. You won't leave me again because I shan't leave you. The first thing you must do is to shave off your hateful beard. And then, darling, I must get you strong and well again. That will be such fun for me. You remember our jokes about apples? I've got the big apple I want."

Gently, he released her.

"Have you forgotten your mother?" he asked.

She replied honestly:

"I have. What shall we all do, what shall we do?"

"Talk it out as quietly as we can."

There was a horsehair sofa near the window. They sat on that. She took his hand.

"What has happened to your hand?"

There are moments in all our lives when evasion of the truth is a sin.

"I was a prisoner for many years. My body is as scarred as my hand. I would rather not speak of it."

"One of your men returned to Montevideo. He said that he saw you dead on the ground when the Indians attacked you."

"I wasn't quite dead."

"How did you escape?"

"It was difficult. I was in a forest, a green hell. I was nearly naked, no arms, with sharp cruel eyes on me night and day."

"Your death was announced in the papers here. Did you know that Mum had married again?"

"Not until yesterday. That's why I must leave today."

"I go with you."

"Child, I have enough money to support myself, to—to see me out. I can't support you."

"But I have money; I'm rich, and more money is coming to me. I go with you, Daddy. We shall waste precious time if we bother about stupid things. *How did you escape?*"

"Because I'm a good swimmer. Perhaps, I don't know, those devils thought they had me for keeps. Nothing exciting to tell you about my escape. I did it at night, when we were

crossing a big river in a dugout which upset. Every man had to save himself. I dived, swam as long as I could under water, came up close to the farther bank, and hid myself."

"And then?"

"I'd learnt a lot about the food the forest supplies. I travelled by night, by the light of the stars. I managed somehow to cross the frontier into Brazil. I worked on a remote rancho for a year. Not a post-office within two hundred miles. When I did get back to civilisation I was a wreck. For a time I taught English in a school. I hadn't a beard then, but I'm damned if I could recognise myself. Still, there was a flicker of life left in the old dog——"

"If—if you felt, as I know you did, that you couldn't write to Mum, why didn't you write to Sir Edward?"

"For the best of reasons: he'd done much too much for me. Apart from the money he gave me, he had saved my honour, if I am impudent enough to call it that. You know why I left you so suddenly?"

"I don't; Mum doesn't know."

"Old Popper knows. My partner let us both in and bolted with the available cash. I swear to you, Eve, that I knew nothing of his dirty work; my fault. I was too keen to gather the apples, and too slack to keep an eye on him. If I'd faced the music I should have been hammered, and probably arrested for fraudulent practices. Cut that out. Popper paid for my passage to Buenos Aires and gave me my big chance. Again I was too venturesome, pushed on too recklessly. Popham must have lost a packet. I—I couldn't ask him to 'stake' me again."

"I understand"—she pressed his hand—"but I can't see you as a schoolmaster."

"I couldn't see myself; so I chucked it. I became a Jack of all trades. I've peddled fancy goods. At long last I found myself in Texas. I saved a bit, tried to double it playing poker, and lost the lot. I rode the ranges for a year. I took the name of Payson. Joke, Eve."

"I don't see it."

"Even a son of a gun—pays. I paid my way through half a dozen States. *Stars and stripes*, I told myself. If I had the stripes I was surely entitled to the stars. Then luck turned. I trebled a small capital in three months. Plain sailing after that. But—no poker! I'm a confirmed miser and skinflint."

"Never will I believe that."

"Finally I found myself in New York, where I saw in *The*

*Tatler* your picture. It—it brought back everything. I had a longing to see you, but I'd sworn to remain—dead. I was dead. But luck stuck to me. I stuck to luck. I got together just about enough to keep me, not a penny more. I crossed the old pond. I believed that nobody in England could ever recognise me. Your mother's address was in *The Tatler*. I knew your Aunt Frances lived here; I hoped she would help her sister."

"She did."

"But I wanted to satisfy myself that she and you were fairly comfortable. So the day before yesterday I travelled down to Guildford. I shall leave it this afternoon."

"I repeat, I shall go with you."

Eve, no doubt, had forgotten that Anstey was cooling his heels outside the *Angel*. She was absorbed in her father. But Anstey may have come to the conclusion that his long wait could mean only one thing: Eve had found her father.

As Eve spoke, she started. There was a knock on the door. She withdrew her hand as Jim Golightly said:

"Come in."

Anstey entered the parlour.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

### I

EVE SPED TO HIM, CLUTCHING HIS ARM.

"Larry, it's my father. Please forgive me! I forgot you were waiting for me."

The men shook hands.

"Dr. Anstey is my friend, Daddy, a real friend. I had to go to him this morning, before I came here. He has been such a help. I told him I was sure that Mr. Payson was you."

"I was not so sure," said Anstey, "but Eve was wise to ask for my help, Mr. Golightly."

"I remain Payson, Dr. Anstey."

As he spoke he glanced at the wall near the door. Through the square opening covered by a shutter, drinks could be served from the bar, now empty. Anstey nodded, but his eyes were on the speaker, who looked, as well he might, bewildered. His scarred hands were trembling; he had not picked up his spectacles, which lay on the worn carpet, but his eyes with their short black

lashes were aglow. They had been the most attractive features in his face; still, after years of suffering, the eyes of an adventurer.

He was about to speak, when Eve said excitedly:

"I couldn't go to anybody else, Daddy. He saved Aunt Fanny's life." Anstey made a gesture. "He can help us, especially YOU. He can make you again what you were."

Anstey held up his hand.

"The situation," he said, "calls for a lawyer, not a doctor."

"It calls for me," Eve retorted. "My father talks of leaving Guildford today. Is he fit to be alone? I shall go with him; I've made up my mind. Nobody can stop me."

Physically weak, quivering with emotions he was unable to control, Jim Golightly's humour displayed itself.

"Women, Dr. Anstey, have an advantage over men. They allow nothing to interfere with the determination to have their own way."

"If that be true," Anstey replied, "it is our privilege to smooth their ways. I suggest that we go to my house, where we shall run no risk of being overheard."

He bent down, picked up the spectacles and handed them to their owner, who put them on. His hands, so Anstey noticed, no longer trembled.

"Thank you, Dr. Anstey. My cap is in my room. I'll get it."

"Put on an overcoat, Daddy."

She opened the door; he passed through it, turned, smiled, and disappeared.

Eve closed the door. Breathlessly, she confronted her friend.

"You s-see how f-feeble he is?" He nodded. "Is he fit to travel?"

"He is not."

"You—you think I'm obstinate. I am; I—I get my obstinacy from him, poor darling. He ought to be in bed. You agree?"

"I agree"; he assumed a professional tone. "And you, if you don't take a pull on yourself, will break down. I warn you. You have accumulated, during a happy life, reserves of strength which are so easily frittered away. His weakness calls for your strength."

"And yours," she whispered. "I know you won't fail us."

He laid a firm hand on her shoulder.

"You have shopping to do?"

"Shopping——! Luckily I've a list in my bag. What I have

to take back has gone out of my head. Nothing matters except him."

"Everything matters, if this situation can be—adjusted without a public scandal. Don't speak! If I ask you to do your shopping after we have talked things over in my rooms, leave your father with me. I may have to say to him what I would spare you. Give me your word."

"I'll leave you at once. You think of so much that I ought to think of. Shush-h-h!"

Her father opened the door. He had on his cap and an overcoat. He carried a stick.

"I'm ready for the road," he said in a firm voice.

## 2

Anstey's consulting-room was near his front door. He had paid scant (too scant) attention to its decoration and furnishings. But austerity impressed patients who set store on comfort. It looked as if it belonged to a man concerned with the welfare of others. On the walls—distempered too cold a grey—hung steel engravings of famous surgeons and physicians. When Eve had asked him why they had pride of place, he had growled out: "Lest we forget." Then he had spoken of the sacrifices offered on the altar of science. John Hunter and his brother had died comparatively young men. "Hunter," Anstey had said, "was the right name for them." Above the mantelpiece hung a fine engraving of Holman Hunt's *Light of the World*, the Greatest Physician of all time. There was a big desk, two easy chairs, and an unglazed bookcase full of books, booklets and pamphlets. Coconut matting covered the floor. . . .

Anstey sat at his desk. On it was a photograph of a young woman sitting at ease. On her lap her slender fingers appeared to be caressing a thin volume. Her eyes were the eyes of a thinker. When Eve had said, "I wonder what your mother is thinking about?" he had replied: "I can tell you. The book in her hand was given to her by my father, before they became engaged. She was thinking of him; and she went on thinking of him till she died when I was born."

Eve and her father sat in the easy chairs. They waited for Anstey to speak first. He addressed Mr. Payson:

"You have a passport?"

"In my pocket. Satisfy yourself that I am James Payson."

He handed the passport to Anstey, who glanced at it and stared at the speaker. Eve, doing her best to obey her mentor, wondered why he appeared to be startled. She, too, was about to receive a shock.

"Your occupation, Mr. Payson, made me forget my manners."

Mr. Payson chuckled.

"Tell her," he said. "No; I'll tell her in my own way. Eve, would you have been asked to be bridesmaid at a fashionable wedding if the bride, Mrs.—er——"

"Politho——"

"If Mrs. Politho had known that your father was a common or garden—butcher?"

"*You*," she gasped, "a butcher?"

"Why not? I told you I had ridden the ranges in Texas. I know all about fat steers. A Chicago packer offered me a billet. He had brains to use my brains. He gave me a chance I grabbed. Within a year I started a little butcher business of my own. I sold out two months ago, when my health failed."

Anstey returned the passport.

"I know little," he went on, "of the Law. During and after the war men reported missing and believed to be dead came back to England to find their wives remarried. It is, I hope, reasonable to suppose that in such cases the Law is merciful."

Mr. Payson stroked his beard.

"Perhaps. I know nothing of the Law, and—and I snap my fingers at it. I refuse to disturb my wife's peace——"

"Eve"—Anstey looked at her.

"Yes, Larry?"

"Won't your mother's peace be disturbed if you don't do your shopping?"

Eve jumped up.

"Yes; it will. I can do it in twenty minutes. I told Mum last night that I might be late, as my car needed an overhaul."

"Do your shopping. Come back as soon as you can. You will find us here."

She hurried out of the room.

"You arranged that exit," said Mr. Payson.

"I did. You can say to me what you might shrink from saying before her."

"Ask any questions you please. I'll answer 'em."

"Were you upset when you found out that your wife had married another man?"

"No. I didn't know she had done so till yesterday. I was

quite prepared. I had been away for ten years. It upset me a little to find that she had married a parson. What sort of fellow is he?"

Anstey could answer this to Mr. Payson's satisfaction. He ended on the highest note:

"Woodward is the best man I know."

"But he *is* a parson. He couldn't live with another fellow's wife?"

"Impossible. That is why I wanted to talk alone with you. If you had found your wife still Mrs. Golightly, would you have revealed yourself to her?"

"I swear I wouldn't. I figured it out years ago. I bolted from her. It was the only thing I could do. Had I stayed in England, she might have seen me in the dock. I was penniless; I couldn't live with her, if I escaped gaol, without living *on* her. I—I——"

"Please. I had to tell Eve to face this calmly; I tell you the same."

"Thanks. A butcher, if he's a kindly man, has to control his feelings when he kills a calf. If I had to cut my own throat I'd do it coolly."

Again he chuckled.

Anstey had difficulty in restraining his feelings. As a doctor he saw before him a man so stricken with infirmities that he wanted to instal him there and then in his Home. On the other hand, he was amazed that such a physical weakling could talk like a young man with a sort of buccaneering zest.

"I'm not as dour as I look," Anstey said, after a pause. "I understand your wish to find out for yourself the conditions here. I have seen a photograph of you which Eve showed me. Nothing in it would identify James Payson with James Golightly, except the eyes."

"Did you tell Eve to drop her bag?"

"No."

Walking from the *Angel* to the *White House* Eve had mentioned the incident.

"Before she comes back, can you tell me how you are facing this tragedy?"

"Calmly enough. Till those damned specs fell off, all was going according to plan. I intended to go back to the States by the next boat. You are Eve's friend; you're a clever man; you must make it plain that she can't come with me."

"Suppose she did——"

"You mean——?"

"She couldn't leave home without giving a mother reasons for doing so. Even if she lied, she would be found out. Often a doctor has to lie to his patients. Again and again it has been my experience that it would have been better in the end to tell the truth."

"Tell the truth to me."

At some length Anstey spoke of Eve and her mother and Mrs. Crampton. He used no flowers of speech. He dealt with the characters of the three women; he made it plain that Eve was a country girl, typically English, adaptable up to a point, not altogether amenable to cut-and-dried conventions, having her own way because her ways were so pleasant. He spoke of Quentin and his step-daughter's love for him. Not a word was wasted on his listener. He spoke of Eve's season in Mayfair which, so he affirmed, had quickened rather than moderated her love for a simple life. This recital took time. There was cumulative tension throughout the narrative, leading slowly to the climax.

"Your reappearance, Mr. Payson, may wreck many lives."

"Don't I know it? There's one bright spot. You are Eve's friend; you know her far better than I do. Damn it! I'm too tired to think. In my place what would you do?"

"Waiting for Eve outside your inn, almost sure that her intuition was not at fault, I had time to think out what ought to be done. If necessary I will break this news to the Woodward as gently as I can. I know what he will do. He will go back to his vicarage. In a case so sad and exceptional, a divorce between Mrs. Golightly and you can, I think, be brought about without the usual delays, without too much publicity. It is certain that Woodward will keep away from *Meadowsweet* till he can remarry Mrs. Golightly."

As his voice died away, Eve came back.

3

She carried her head high; but her chin stuck out at an uncompromising angle. Before she sat down, she approached the desk, facing Anstey with her back to her father.

"Have you done your duty as a doctor?"

"A doctor?"

"Of course you got rid of me so that you could examine him."



He was taken aback.

"Time enough for that later on, if Mr. Payson presents himself as a patient. He hasn't done so yet."

"Oh, dear! I hoped you would have good news for me. I have a full hour. And I can get back here after luncheon." She sat down. "Will you tell me what you have been talking about?"

She glanced at her father, who shook his head.

"I have talked to your father about your mother and you. I have suggested a possible plan of action. You came in before he had time to consider it."

"May I hear it?"

"Yes. I would remind you of a story you told me about a cousin of yours who left her father's house, hid herself, and caused her people intolerable anxiety. You wouldn't attempt anything of that sort, would you?"

He held her eyes, slightly disconcerted. Had she reverted to the go-as-I-please, devil-may-care, don't-care-a-hoot independence of the modern miss?

"I shall never forget that," she replied.

"But you contemplated leaving Guildford with your father this afternoon."

He spoke too stiffly.

"Contemplated——! I counted on you to coax him to stay here, here in this house, till he was strong enough to travel."

Now she was cooing at him, smiling, as much at her ease as he was not.

"And you? Did you expect me to engage your services as his nurse?"

Before she could answer, Jim Golightly, speaking in the tones which had so endeared him to her when she was a child, interrupted:

"Poppet, you are not old enough to drive a car; you go, as you always did, too fast. And I, may God forgive me, never tried to father you. But," his voice deepened, "I am your father, and I expect you to obey me. If I leave Guildford this afternoon I forbid you to come with me."

She burst into tears, sobbing, rocking herself to and fro, frantic with distress. Anstey left his chair, seized her hands, gripped them so hard that he hurt her and said thunderously:

"Stop it! Are you a child? If you have no consideration for me, spare your father."

She responded.

"Take your hands away. You're hurting me."

"Hurting you," he replied; "if hurting you makes a little fool realise her power of hurting others, I offer no apologies."

He had slapped hysterical girls; afterwards a few had thanked him. He was far from expecting thanks from her, but they were forthcoming.

"I can't help being a fool. You've brought me to my senses. I—I apologise. How I wish my imagination didn't bolt with me. For the last twenty minutes I've been kidding myself that you were telling Daddy how ill he is. Matron told me you'd no use for amateur nurses."

She was now herself again; he returned to his desk. He was unaware of it, but his left eyebrow had shot up.

"Did you ask Matron if she'd take you on here?"

"Yes, I did. Nothing doing."

Her father broke in:

"We are wasting Dr. Anstey's time. I am not ill."

"You are, Daddy."

No Old Etonian would have asked a man who was not his own doctor the question which a sometime butcher put to Anstey.

"Do you think I am ill?" he asked.

"I know you are."

"You can't know without vetting me."

"I do *know* it, Mr. Payson."

"So do I," Eve said.

"Important though your health is, we must leave it in abeyance for the moment." He turned to Eve. "You say that sense has come back. Your mother and your aunt are sensible women. You have been exercising your imagination. How far did it carry you? If your father were in this house, under my care, you hoped to see much of him?"

"I did. I could see him nearly every day, because I shop here every day. That would give us time, I mean it would give *you* time to think out what was best to be done."

"You have astounding faith in me?"

"You know I have."

"I should like to justify it. Telepathy was at work when you were buying bacon and what not. What you thought out for yourself is part of my plan of action. The truth cannot be kept from the persons most concerned—your mother and Woodward. But it may be withheld for a few days, if your father does what you suggest. A room happens to be vacant. Even if I am mistaken a few days in bed will do him good."

"It won't," said Mr. Payson. "I spent half my time in my

bunk crossing the Atlantic. I feel more tired lying down than limping about."

"Were you under treatment?"

"No."

"What you have said confirms my diagnosis. You don't know it, but you're the victim of a form of anaemia which is, figuratively, a sort of creeping paralysis."

"You've got it in one. Is it curable?"

"Assuredly. It wasn't curable a few years ago."

"Will you examine me here and now?"

"I'm at your service. Eve can go home. If she has more shopping to do this afternoon she can drop in. I venture to predict that she will find you in bed."

"You hear, petlet?"

"I hear. I'll do what I'm told."

She kissed her father and left the room.

4

Anstey broke the silence that ensued.

"She doesn't realise what her home is and has been to her."

"Before you vet me, satisfy my curiosity. Has her home life been exceptional?"

"It has. Her aunt, Mrs. Crampton, told me little details which interested me. Eve has been her mother's companion. She never went to a boarding school. That is why she is in many ways older than her years and in other ways younger. She has been her aunt's companion. She has changed that good lady immeasurably, quickened maternal instincts almost atrophied from disuse. She speaks of Eve as her child. Have you forgotten your nursery days?"

"No. I didn't know what home life was. I was kept more or less in the nursery. I feared my father more than I loved him. One reason why I rather spoiled Eve. I wanted her to love me. I interrupted you——"

"I feared my father. My mother died of puerperal fever when I was ten days old. I'm afraid of boring you. . . . Infant welfare is not my line of country. I'm not a G.P. It confounds me when I meet mothers, upper-middle-class mothers, who sincerely believe that they have lavished devotion on their children because they provide nurses and governesses, and out of twenty-four hours give the darlings only one. I know two girls who live

near to Mrs. Crampton. Eve calls them Bubble and Squeak. Those two will marry the first man who asks them to leave a home that isn't a home. Your Eve has two homes and two mothers. Mr. Woodward is more friend than stepfather. I can conceive a man falling in love with a charming creature and hesitating to take her from a home which has been an earthly paradise to her. Eve has another side to her character. Was it you who talked to her about apples?"

"Yes."

"You told an intelligent child that if one wants apples one must go bald-headed for them."

"I did."

"She adored you; she adores you still. She covets fresh experiences. At the moment she would gaily, yes, gaily, leave her earthly paradise and go with you to the uttermost ends of the earth. There's not a grain of heartlessness in her. She believes that you have the first claim on her. She might become the best of nurses. Now I'll attend to my own business. I'll begin by taking your blood pressure."

## 5

At three, Eve found herself alone with Anstey in his consulting room.

"Tell me the worst," she insisted. "I can bear it. No more blubbering in front of you."

"Your father asked me to tell you the truth. He has pernicious anaemia. You may remember that I treated a bad case of it to a successful issue."

"You have him in bed?"

"He's at the *Angel*, packing his suit-case. I gave him luncheon. He may be here for some time. How long I can't say. I have told Matron that you brought him to me. It won't surprise her if you drop in occasionally, not too often."

"What a relief! God sent me to you. Did Daddy raise any difficulties?"

He lied.

"None."

"You have your way with all of us, even with Auntie. I say, did you want to hurt my hands?"

"I did. You were on the ragged edge of hysteria."

"Never again. Dr. Anstey, I've got pernicious anaemia. Can you cure me?"

"I can't cure you of talking nonsense."

"I'm serious. I'm not suffering from poverty of the blood but the—the——"

"Leucocytes."

"Yes; the leucocytes have attacked my brains. Daddy said that Americans thought John Bull a bully. All Englishmen who aren't Nancies are bullies. Daddy and you kicked me out of this room. Halfway to Limpley I remembered that I'd come away without knowing what your plan was. What is it? You've done splendid work; I grovel, although both my hands are bruised. You've got Daddy. What next?"

A lady novelist might say that Anstey bit his lip. Nervously he began to fill a pipe, which no self-respecting doctor should do in his consulting-room. He decided that he was "for it". Anaemia had not affected the brains of the woman who was his friend. She confronted him valiantly.

"Driving, home did it occur to you that your mother, when she learns the truth—which sooner or later must be told—might go back to your father?"

"I did think of that, Larry. She couldn't."

"Why not?"

"Because she's going to have a baby next April."

6

If Anstey had bitten his lip, he would have shed much blood. His pipe fell to the matting. As he stooped to pick it up the blood which might have flowed from a bitten lip rushed to his head. He, a doctor, had overlooked a complication likely to wreck his plan. He had good reason to believe himself a good judge of men. Women were, admittedly, the unknown quantity. His patient, enfeebled though he was, obstinate, devil-may-care, impatient of any form of restraint, was still attractive. He had inspired devotion in his daughter; he must have been beloved by his wife. If—if she went back to him, who would throw a pebble at her? He had hoped too fondly that this would cut the Gordian knot. Woodward, such an honest parson, might urge her to do so. . . .

"I've upset you," Eve whispered.

"You have. My plan is a wash-out. We must think out another."

"We?"

He was no longer master of his tongue when he murmured:

"Two heads are better than one."

"There's only one, Larry dear. Yours."

"Your mother won't leave your Uncle Quint."

"She won't. I—I should despise her if she did."

To her amazement he sighed.

"Oughtn't you to go back to the lab? I can wait here till Daddy comes in."

"Damn the lab!"

"Larry——!"

"Little you know of my work."

"That's not my fault; you won't talk about it."

"I'll talk about it now," he replied angrily. "It's so absorbing that I cease to be human. I'm not a man, I'm a microscope. I have to live in a world where a germ is of supreme importance. Strange, strange that the infinitely small should become finitely great. But it's so. There was once a fellow, I've forgotten his name, a potter. He was experimenting when his furnace died down. He had no wood to replenish it. What did he do? He chopped up his bed—his bed—and rekindled his furnace."

"Was he Bernard Palissy?"

His face relaxed.

"I think he was. Eve, I got too hot in the collar. If I went to the lab, I couldn't work. My thoughts are focussed on you, you, and"—he added hastily—"your mother. If her peace of mind was shattered, her baby might not be born."

"Her peace of mind mustn't be shattered."

A bell tinkled.

"That's your father. I'll let him in."

7

Eve, as a young woman, would have resented any charge that she was demonstrative in her affections. She believed that (with the one exception of her mother) she had schooled herself to behave "decently", as became Miss Poindexter's former pupil. But the mere sight of an adored father had turned her into a child again. Regardless of Anstey, she flung herself into Mr. Payson's arms and embraced him rapturously after removing his spectacles. She noticed that he had trimmed his beard and was wearing less shabby clothes. Like a child, she exclaimed:

"I have you; I can't be your nurse; but I shall see you every day. I'm mad with happiness."

Her lack of restraint both moved and surprised Anstey. Still, if he, within the past five minutes, had lost self-control, excuses must be made for a woman more than ten years younger than himself. None the less, he compared this outburst of love with one of the Chiltern Hills in eruption. How would it affect his patient?

During Mr. Ramsay MacDonald's brief reign, a former symbol of class distinction, the Old School tie, was belittled and ridiculed. So was the Oxford accent. Curiously enough, the Public School face provoked no acidulous comment. A famous Old Etonian was asked why he never wore his school tie. He replied with dignity: "Where I was self-educated is indelibly inscribed on my face." Anstey, staring at the face of a Chicago butcher, chuckled inwardly, reflecting that an Old Etonian was in his consulting-room. Years of hardship and suffering had been impotent to obliterate the hall-mark of *what*? Was it arrogance? No. Was it indifference? No. Was it the stamp of rank? No. He himself had been brought up (provocative expression) at a first-rate grammar school. Slowly, whilst Eve was crooning over her father, he drifted to the conviction that what Etonians, Harrovians and Wykehamists labelled "good form" explained James Golightly's face. He was faintly smiling, passive, obviously pleased. Anstey could recall girls kissing their boys farewell, hugging them at railway stations; and the boys, soon to go "over the top", had responded as ardently. But a few had looked as Golightly looked, not cold, not indifferent, but uneasily conscious that such endearments were "not done" in public.

As soon as possible, the father released himself from clinging arms and sat down, addressing Anstey.

"What have you told her?"

Anstey made a gesture indicating that he had told Eve more than enough, saying deprecatingly:

"Eve has been here only a few minutes. She knows that you are now my patient and, speaking as your doctor, I have ventured to assure her that you have not come to me, as so many do, too late."

"Ah! Then we know where we are."

"Yes, Daddy; and we know where we aren't. We aren't in smooth water, far from it. But Dr. Anstey is in command of our little boat, and from now on I shall behave myself and obey him."

The patient's face was inscrutable. He might have been a spectator at a Test Match, interested but aloof.

"If Dr. Anstey is in command, Eve, it is up to him to tell us

what he thinks fit. For the moment we are all marking time. What he proposes to do later on, I don't know and I can't guess."

He spoke in a tired voice. Anstey nodded.

"I'll tell both of you my plan of action and inaction.

## 8

Eve had seated herself on the arm of her father's chair. Anstey sat erect in the other easy chair.

"This room," he began, "is a consulting-room. As a consultant I have this advantage over a general practitioner. I profit by *his* experience of the case, by *his* failure to treat it successfully. I can eliminate at once his treatment. Then, as a specialist, I can try something else. I had a plan which is hopeless. Eve tells me that her mother will not return to you."

"You thought she would?"

"Perhaps I hoped she would."

"That is hopeless," said his patient.

"Then we have to fall back on common sense. As soon as it is practicable Mrs. Woodward's second marriage must be legalised. She must get a divorce. It might be expedited. Eve knows many distinguished men. The Head of your family has great affection for her. Eve, I hope, can pull strings. What Mrs. Woodward will do is known only to herself. Most fortunately she has her cottage; Mr. Woodward has his vicarage. When the truth should be told is a nice matter. Eve must break it to her. Eve must tell Mrs. Crampton. I am as sure as any outsider can be that all of you will have the sympathy of your friends and neighbours. . . ."

"I know we shall," Eve affirmed. "But you must give me time: I couldn't tell Mum till you, Daddy, are stronger. Mum will have Uncle Quint; and you will have me. Any talk will soon die down."

Anstey heard her clear, eager voice, but his eyes were on his patient, whose face was hidden from Eve. He looked apathetic. When he spoke, his voice was barely audible.

"If—if I had left Guildford today and—and returned to New York, there would have been no talk, no dislocations."

Anstey became a dual personality. As doctor he was dismayed, knowing that without highly specialised treatment his patient must die. As a man he understood that James Golightly was wishing he were dead. Eve said calmly:



"You've left me out. Can you do that? I should be here, knowing that my own mother was living with a man not her husband."

Her father remained silent.

Anstey had feared he might say that his lease of life was terminated, that his death would save the situation. Knowing that Eve would now accept whatever he said, knowing that his patient had no strength to resist authority, he spoke automatically:

"You are here, sir, my patient. Be sure that I realise my responsibilities. You are fagged out. Your room is ready. Eve and I will take you to it."

He left his chair to open the door. The patient made no protest. He stood up. Eve took his arm. Together they left the consulting-room.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

### I

ANSTEY LIED WHEN EVE ASKED HIM IF HER FATHER HAD OBJECTED to the move from the *Angel* to *White House*. Dr. Bishop would have hemm'd and ha'ed, refusing to answer questions and thereby provoking a curiosity which a wiser man quashed with a monosyllable: *none*. What passed between the men must be briefly set down.

"You are most kind," Mr. Payson had said. "Under happier circumstances I would avail myself gratefully of your skill. I was a fool to come here. The sooner I leave the better."

"I disagree. You refuse to take Eve with you?"

"Emphatically."

"Then you place her in an untenable position. Do you expect her to hold her tongue?"

"I do."

"Granting that she could, all her joy in life would ooze out of her. She is incapable of dissimulation."

"I couldn't make out what was wrong with me. No pain, no heart attacks, nothing to warn me that I was unsound, nothing but a tired feeling. I dosed myself with tonics . . . I decided that I was drifting out; and the temptation to see Eve was too strong. My life is over."

He spoke dispassionately.

"If I assured you that I could deal with this anaemia?"

"*Cui bono?*"

"Your daughter would never forgive me if I let you leave here in your present condition."

For an instant vitality flickered in Jim's eyes. It was on the tip of his tongue to ask: "Is Eve more than a friend to you?" Old Etonians refrain from asking awkward questions. But his chin stuck out. Anstey approached the situation from another angle.

"If you died here in this room, it could not alter the fact that your wife is living in what her sister would term open sin. May I suggest that you are not fit to make a decision of such importance to others? I can almost guarantee that if you place yourself unreservedly in my hands, you will, within a fortnight, be another man. Your life may be valueless to you; think of what it means to Eve."

A few minutes later, Jim surrendered.

2

Eve returned to *Meadowsweet*, fortified by faith, hope and love; she had unshakable faith in Anstey; she had ever-increasing hope that her mother's happiness would remain inviolate, and her love for her father was greater than ever.

Most women can hide from others pain and misery; happiness cannot be hid; it radiates out of shining eyes. Eve, however, wanted to be alone so that she could plot and plan for the future. She put away the car, learnt from Mrs. Tagg that Sybil and Quentin were in the village, hastened to her bedroom and picked up Daddy's photograph, gazing entranced at the face smiling at her.

"You're going to look like that," she whispered, "and I shan't be happy till you do."

She had half an hour before tea was served.

She lay on her bed. Day-dreams are often pleasanter than night-dreams. Mr. Payson, whom she differentiated as an identity with nothing in common with Mr. James Golightly, was in bed, and likely to stay there, a bearded stranger. He would vanish when his beard was removed. She would keep the spectacles as long as she lived. She hoped to visit *White House* nearly every day. Matron would be told that Mr. Payson was her friend. She could take to him books and flowers. . . .

Larry, who must be humoured and obeyed, did not regard

her as a silly girl. He had elevated her to a post of tremendous importance; she, none other, was appointed to act as a minister plenipotentiary. She, when her Chief gave the signal, would have to resurrect Daddy. She was hopeful that she could do it without causing great pain. Her mother's serenity was not likely to fail her. Mrs. Tagg and Ellen, staunch friends, would be the first of the villagers to be told the truth. These good gossips could be trusted to deal compassionately with the sad facts. They would murmur: "It's God's will, dear," and dab at their eyes. She could see them doing it. Larry expected her to pull strings. . . . She could visualise herself going to the Duke and Uncle Alaric. . . . Uncle Quint said that his best sermons were inspired from without. Eve was too excited to rehearse her lines. They, she believed, would be inspired by her guardian angel. The Duke would have a word with the Lord Chancellor. The first marriage might be annulled without any hateful, long-drawn-out divorce proceedings. . . .

Suddenly, peering into the future, Eve espied a baby.

Her heart almost stopped beating. If the baby were born before her mother could remarry Quentin, it would be illegitimate——!

With this disconcerting possibility confronting her, Eve became a Veal. Her mother, no other member of this respected family, gave the lie to the dictum: *Once a Veal, always a Veal*. But Aunt Fanny might have another seizure. . . . Eve had rebuked the Beetle for using a word never heard in Aunt Fanny's drawing-room: *bastard*. The Beetle had not apologised: "Good honest English word, Miss Prim, used by Shakespeare."

Could the father of a bastard preach in Limpley Church?

She pushed out of her mind a baby mercifully as yet unborn.

Another vision took its place. Aunt Fanny, being a Veal, would exercise common sense. She would protest vehemently if HER child left Limpley. Why should she? Eve saw herself living in the cottage with Daddy, a guarded flame, at ease in the chintzy parlour. Quentin and Mum would go back to the Vicarage. . . .

Miss 1947 may curl a contemptuous lip. Such a vision of tranquil family life would hold no lure for her. Nevertheless, so far, Eve preferred such a life to any other. No man had stirred her pulses.

She heard voices downstairs. She slipped off the bed, and surveyed her flushed face in the looking-glass.

"I believe I feel too happy," she whispered.

## 3

At tea, more than wishful thinking sustained her. Even today, in a world racked by suspense and suffering, there are some fortunate persons, living for the most part in quiet country villages, who are immune from carking care. They are not of those who exclaim lightly: "Begone, dull care!" They may bear in mind a poignant cry:

"Master, carest thou not that we perish?"

The Great Exemplar, we may be sure, preserved his serenity even in Gethsemane. Eve was not yet old enough to know that her mother's serenity had made her child exceptionally happy. Quentin Woodward had exercised influence, not merely as parson but as a man who disdained petty worries and vexations. Aunt Fanny displayed admirable fortitude when she took to her bed. . . .

The Vicar and his curate spoke of a plucky old parishioner, bed-ridden but cheerful.

"She's not afraid of death," Sybil said.

Quentin quoted Addison:

" 'Sir Thomas More thought any degree of sorrow and concern on such an occasion as his death which had nothing in it which could deject or terrify him.' "

At once, Eve said excitedly:

"Yesterday I gave a limping man a lift into Guildford. He looked dreadfully ill, his forehead was as grey as his beard. He was staying at the *Angel*. I begged him to go to Larry. I saw Larry this afternoon. You won't believe it, but this American took my advice. He is now in the Home. I should like to take him some Michaelmas daisies, and if you have any 'thrillers', Uncle Quint, I could take them along."

"An American, Eve?"

"He says so. His name is Payson. Larry tells me he has pernicious anaemia."

"Then he's doomed."

"That's what made me mention him. He doesn't look terrified. He cut a joke or two. Larry thinks he can cure him."

"Cure? That's a word I never heard our friend use. I'll find some books for you. Take along, as before, a few eggs. He's in good hands."

Eve was pleased with herself. Visitation of the sick was a duty to the well. Already she had soaped her ways.

"Is the bus running smoothly again?" Quentin asked.

"Never better."

"What should we do without our housewife?"

"You'd wriggle along without me. You two would be happy on a desert island."

Sybil smiled.

"Perhaps, if there were a doctor on it."

She had not kept secret the advent of the baby.

## 4

For a few days Eve saw but little of her father and much less of Anstey. Rules in his Home were seldom relaxed. Visitors could come at eleven and three for a brief visit. Anstey told Eve to be as discreet as possible. His patient was patient; he had expressed no wish to leave his room; no nurse was in attendance; he appeared to be passing the time pen in hand.

"Writing letters?"

"He will tell you what he's writing."

He did.

"I've never had time, Eve, to set down my experiences in Paraguay. I'm writing my remi—nuisances."

She smiled. His voice was stronger; he could still joke; he talked as he had talked when she was a child.

"How I shall love reading them," she assured him, "but you mustn't overwork yourself."

"Difficult to do that when the work is easy. It isn't too easy. At Eton my Latin prose was better than my English."

"Won't you read me what you've written?"

"I have something to say but I don't know how to say it. I won't read a line till I've licked the stuff into better shape. Besides, when you're here I prefer to talk to you."

Anstey had encouraged his patient to leave his bed. Had the weather been fine, Mr. Payson could have strolled about the garden, but October had turned chill. Eve had been *ordered* in no uncertain tones to curtail her visits. "If you linger too long, tongues will wag," he said. "He's not in your hands; he's in mine."

She had replied, with a pout, "I know how strong your hands are." On her third visit, Daddy, so she thought, seemed worried. He laid aside his pen as soon as she entered the room.

"How," he asked, "are things at the cottage?"

"Same as usual. Mum and Uncle Quint encourage me to come here."

"Eve, when are they going to be told?"

"When Larry gives the word. You must be good till you're stronger. If you're sure it won't excite you, I'll tell you my plans, and—and the Chief thinks they're not too bad."

"On, Stanley, on."

"I told you the Beetle was a cousin of ours. He's my greatest pal. I've had lots of fun with him. If I give him a tinkle, he'll answer the bell and whisk me off to a little inn we know, where I can get at him. He's to be trusted; I could tell you how he helped another girl, but I haven't time——"

"Your greatest pal, eh?"

"Well, is he?" She laughed. "Maybe Larry is now my greatest pal, but he can't do what the Beetle can. If I tell the Beetle everything, he can tell Uncle Alaric and the Duke, and they will do the wangling. See?"

"I see. And then——?"

"And then I can tackle Aunt Fanny. No cushy job, darling, but I can get round her, tickle up her soft spot, colloque with her. Perhaps together we can tell Mum." He nodded. "You may be sure of this: Mum won't go off the deep end."

"Why are you so sure of that?"

She hesitated.

"B-because she daren't."

"Daren't?"

"Larry told me not to tell you, but I must—I must. There's a baby c-c-coming."

His face remained impassive. After a pause, he said quietly:

"That is a joy to all of you?"

"It is. Does it hurt you?"

"No; I'm glad—glad."

"What a relief to hear you say that. I think I'll ring up the Beetle tomorrow."

"Prepare yourself for disappointment. Suppose Alaric went to the Lord Chancellor?"

"He will. I'm counting on that."

She had told him how generously the Head of the Family had behaved; and any rancour still left in him had gone.

"Before the war, petlet, the mighty were almighty. Now the poor man is coming into his own. My sympathies are with him. The Lord Chancellor might turn a deaf ear to any sort of—of special pleading from a K.G."

"You're a poor man."

"I am. And I've come into my own. You are here."

## 5

The Beetle answered the call. He carried off Eve to the *Hind's Head*, where she insisted on paying for the luncheon. He looked comically incredulous when the astounding facts were laid before him. None the less his first reaction was that of a man who rode hard to hounds.

"We must get you out of this hole without losing a minute."

"Me?"

"It affects you even more than your mother. I'd do anything for you, but what the hell can I do?"

"You can tell Uncle Alaric."

"Right . . . I will. Now—don't worry! This happened again and again during the war. I don't believe a divorce is needed. The first marriage can be—annulled. That's the word, annulled. If your father were a Roman, the Pope could do it in a jiffy. Forgive me, old thing! Thinking of you, I forgot to ask about your father. You say he's in a Guildford nursing-home, knocked out. When will he be in the ring again?"

"I—I don't know."

"And your mother has not been told. She might want to go back to your father."

"If she did, he might not take her back. . . . Not—not as his wife, I mean. . . . If—if you could see him . . . He came back to England to see me."

They had left the dining-room and were alone in a small parlour. The Beetle felt dazed, but he recalled a popular play.

"Your mother knows what every woman knows."

Eve was puzzled.

"What does every woman know?"

"You saw Barrie's play with that title?"

"Before my time."

"Every woman knows that some man or other is helplessly dependent on her; and every man, who is a man, knows that to be true. If your father is knocked out, your mother might go to him and stick to him to the end. It strikes me, boob though I am, that she's the woman to do it."

"Aren't you forgetting that Daddy has me?"

He looked blank. She was unaware of it, but a lover was staring piteously at her.

"You—you—b-b-but——" he stammered, as he broke off

"But what?"

No excuses can be made for the poor fellow. He could not possibly have chosen a worse moment to declare feelings so long suppressed. He spoke huskily:

"God never made you to be a nurse——"

"I'm beginning to believe He did."

"A man ought to look after you. What sort of a life are you leading?"

"A very happy one, much happier than yours."

"That's one on the point. I'm unhappy, at a loose end, because I want you. If you'll marry me, I'll chuck the Blues. I'll apply for a staff job. I'll pass into Camberley, I'll——"

"Beetle——"

Her soft voice misled him. His freckled face was scarlet with emotion, his red hair was bristling. He jumped up.

"You're a world's darling and I'm a rotter, but, if you'll give yourself to me, I'll be your slave."

"I—I," she faltered, "couldn't marry a slave. I'd sooner my man beat me than fawned on me. They say that any girl knows when a man is in love with her. I knew you were in love at Flam; but you told me you'd hopped in and out of love a dozen times. And then we agreed to be friends"—her voice quavered—"and we have been friends. I can't marry you; I—I wish I could. I've never wanted to marry any man; I've been so happy at home."

Her voice trailed off.

The Beetle tugged at his collar. He was a good loser; he had learnt much from women. Accordingly, he accepted defeat with a wry smile.

"We're as we were, Eve. I know when I'm beat. And a donkey doesn't apologise when he brays. I feel a cad for rushing you when you're here to talk about your father. Cut me out."

"You mean you won't help me?"

"What help I can give is yours." He sat down, mopping his forehead with a handkerchief which matched his tie and socks; he jerked up his trousers.

"Add my scalp to the others hanging from your belt."

"There is only one other."

"I can't swallow that."

"It's true. One other man has asked me to marry him, and he proposed by letter. I wouldn't marry an archangel if he were coward enough to write."



"Good for you! Carry on."

Figuratively, they put their heads together. It was agreed, although Eve never mentioned the coming baby, that Sybil's remarriage must be speeded up.

## 6

On the following day Eve found Anstey in his laboratory, non-committal about his patient. She felt that she was disturbing him when at work; work that had to be done. She told him, as briefly as she could, that her cousin's services had been enlisted.

"Then your mother must be enlightened."

"Very good, sir."

"I would spare you this if I could. Shall I speak to Woodward and let him deal with your mother?"

She exclaimed gratefully:

"You *are* a friend. I'm not funkng my duty. My plan is this: I'll speak to Aunt Fanny first. If she suggests that you should go to Uncle Quint, I'll ring you up. I know that if I were Mummy, I should want to be alone before I saw my husband, having to tell him that he wasn't my husband."

"You're right."

When she came in he had not removed his overall. He had a test-tube in his hand which he laid on the table.

"I'll see Aunt Fanny this afternoon."

"The gentleman you speak of as your guardian angel will be with you."

She smiled and left him.

Mrs. Crampton greeted HER child affectionately and playfully:

"You naughty girl! You haven't been near me for days. Can you stay to tea? I'm not expecting visitors. Fetch a stool and sit by me." Eve obeyed.

"Are you quite all right, Auntie?"

"Tch! Never better. Tap wood!"

"I'm going to upset you terribly."

A thought ravaged Aunt Fanny, quick to perceive that Eve's cheeks were flushed. Yes, yes, the inevitable had come to pass. A young lordling had snatched a nestling from the nest. She patted Eve's head.

"It may not upset me."

She spoke so calmly that Eve plucked up courage. Big

surprises never upset Mrs. Crampton. She could and did lose her temper over trifles.

"It's something you could never guess. It—it concerns Mum more than us."

Aunt Fanny winced. A word, one word, would lay so many fond hopes in the dust—MISCARRIAGE.

"Your mother sent you to break dreadful news to me?"

"Mother doesn't know. I have to tell her after I tell you."

"Thank God!"

"Why do you thank God?"

"Never mind. If there is bad news for me, out with it."

"My Daddy is alive."

"What! How do you know?"

"He—he is here in Guildford, at the *White House*, very ill."

Mrs. Crampton sat rigidly upright in her chair. Her eyes wandered round the room till they rested upon her husband's portrait. For the first time, his pleasant, imperturbable face irritated her.

"Am I awake?" she muttered.

"Oh, dear . . . oh, dear! Why did you tell me to 'out with it'?"

Aunt Fanny left this question unanswered.

"Ring the bell, child." Eve did so, and came back to her stool. Aunt Fanny's face was that of a graven image. Milly came in, stiff and starched.

"You rang, Madam?"

"Yes; if anyone should call, I'm not at home."

"Very good."

Milly went out. Knowing the habits of even the best of servants, Aunt Fanny paused for at least an interminable minute before she spoke in an awed whisper.

"It is enough for me that your father has returned from the dead. Have you seen him?"

"Yes; he has changed terribly, but I recognised him. You wouldn't know him."

"I never did know him well. Give me details."

This time Eve told the story crisply and convincingly. When she finished, Mrs. Crampton spoke gently.

"My poor little Eve! You are a brave girl. MY girl. You were right to come to me before telling your mother. You were right to hurry to Dr. Anstey. I'm very pleased with you. One thing is certain: your mother can't go back to your father. You agree?"

"I do."

"And she and Mr. Woodward must separate. Decency forbids their living together till they are remarried. I must wire for John Veal."

"Please wait till I've told Mum."

"Perhaps you are right. We are sure of one thing: the sympathy of the whole neighbourhood. What is so tearing me is your mother's condition and her peace of mind. I am fortified by one FACT. Your father left her; she took his loss as a Christian woman should. She may take his return in the same spirit. When will you tell her?"

"Tonight, after dinner. Uncle Quint has a meeting at the Vicarage; he won't be back till ten."

"Most unfortunate——"

"Unfortunate? Why?"

Aunt Fanny compressed her lips. Veal common sense was at war with Victorian inhibitions. If the Vicar of the parish returned at such a late hour to learn that he had been living with another man's wife, could he leave her? Common sense was revolted at such a thought. On the other hand, could they share the same bed? Such a possibility had not, of course, entered the mind of a modest girl. . . .

But it had. Eve said quietly:

"I know what you're thinking. Mum won't be able to sleep, nor will Uncle Quint. I say it's a blessing that they will be able to talk things out alone together in each other's arms."

"Once more you may be right. If this had happened to ME, should I have torn myself from your dear uncle? No . . . no . . . We mustn't overlook another contingency: before her husband, I—I mean——"

"Do go on, Auntie."

"If, before Mr. Woodward joins you, my poor Sybil should express a wish to fly to ME, you could bring her here even after midnight."

"Yes, I could."

"And you could, on your return to the cottage, say that I had rung you up because I was in bed, which I shall be, and——"

"Ill?"

"Indisposed. In that case my sister and I could decide what should be said to Mr. Woodward tomorrow morning."

"Yes."

"Eve, we must leave this in God's hands."

Eve had to return to *Meadowsweet* for tea. Before she took leave of her second mother, she felt happier. Aunt Fanny was marvellous. Dr. Anstey and she were towers of strength.

## 7

Sybil was enlightened that night soon after nine. Eve had to fib. She fibbed the more convincingly because her mother, for the moment, appeared to have escaped miraculously from herself. Serenity never forsook her till she realised that the lover of her girlhood was a wreck of his former self. Tears streamed down her cheeks when Eve spoke of his scarred hands. She had leaped to the conviction that Jim had returned to England after years of misery to see his daughter before he turned his face to the wall and died. He had not returned to see herself.

"He'll get well, Mum; he looks ever so much better. I want him to shave off his beard, but he won't. You must think of yourself . . . What will you do?"

"I regard my second marriage as more binding than my first."

"Of course you do; and if I were you, I'd stick to Uncle Quentin, not separate from him. There's only one old cat who would scratch—Mrs. Wilmot."

"Darling, don't say this to Aunt Fanny."

"I have; and she said that if this had happened to her, she'd have stuck to Uncle Tom."

"Uncle Tom might have insisted on separating from her."

"If Uncle Quint weren't a parson, he wouldn't care a hang. Anyway, you're not going to *The Gables* tonight, are you?"

"No. I—I feel that I ought to go to your father tomorrow."

"You might interrupt his work. He's writing his reminiscences."

"Then he must be better."

"I tell you he is. Never would I have believed that you could be as sensible as you are."

"He has you," she sighed.

"Yes, he has me; but I didn't save him from hiding himself. Larry did that. And you mustn't go to *White House* till he gives you leave."

"When Quentin comes in, kiss him good night and go to bed."

"I will. He's such a dear. He'll do what's best for all of us."

Steadfastly Sybil refused to talk of the future. She had dried her eyes. She looked to Eve as if she were in a trance. After communing with herself, Eve stood up.

"I'm going to bed now. None of us will sleep a wink, but what does that matter? My face will give me away. And Uncle Quint will put me on the mat."

"Go to bed, darling."

## 8

As soon as Eve left the room, Sybil knelt down. Quentin may have believed that repetition was the first figure of rhetoric, as Napoleon did. Periodically, he preached a short sermon on when to pray and how to pray. Somewhat to the distress of his elderly parishioners, he entreated them not to gabble prayers familiar and perhaps dear to them on that account. Prayer was the ascent of the mind to God. He spoke simply, reminding his people that they were God's children, and as children had access to an all-wise Father. "Wherever you are," he told them, "you can pray. Don't ask for material things. You may not get them. Ask for the gifts of the spirit." He had laughed like a boy when Mrs. Tagg told him that her youngest had asked Omnipotence to bestow a bottle of whiskey on Mr. Tagg.

Sybil prayed for guidance. Her serenity, when Eve was in the parlour, had been a mask. Inwardly she felt stricken. She had loved him, she had mourned his loss; she loved Quentin. It passes the male understanding that a woman can love two men, but nearly every woman knows that it is so. . . .

She rose from her knees wretchedly unhappy.

When Quentin came in, full of cheer, she encouraged him to talk about his meeting. His invincible optimism, his faith in human nature, bubbled out of him.

"Good attendance, Sybil. All young men."

"All *young* men?"

"I tell you they were young at heart. A man is as old as he feels. I felt about five-and-twenty. And the youth in a man of seventy must be served—served. I ought to have labelled my talk *Rejuvenation*, but I tried to stick to words of one syllable."

The meeting had been called (for men only) to establish a fraternity of beggars, pledged to collect funds for larger playing-fields. Woodward's predecessor had done little for the village cricketers and football players. Invariably he had appealed to the well-to-do members of his flock. Quentin had imperilled popularity when he told the men that if they were men, it behoved them to shake themselves free of doles. They might be able to give little, but that little must be forthcoming.

"You get the best out of them," she murmured.

"What else am I here for?"

"Do you think you can get the best out of me?"

He stared at her.

"Odd question to ask. . . . Am I to take it seriously?"

"Most seriously."

He had not yet sat down, talking, as was his wont, from the hearthrug. Sybil was on the sofa. He crossed the room and sat beside her, taking her hand

"Anything wrong, dearest?"

"Yes."

"Tell me."

"Not here, not now. . . . Presently."

"Your hand is cold."

"So are my feet. Quint, I have the saddest story to tell you. And—and it will take a long time to tell. I must tell it with your arms round me. Eve has gone to bed."

"Have you told her?"

"She told it to me."

"It concerns her?"

"It concerns all of us. I can't tell it here."

"But—why not?"

"I've been so happy in this little room."

He was not alarmed because she spoke calmly. Eve, he reflected, exaggerated little village happenings. He made sure that some village girl was "in trouble". He was as sensitive as Sybil to intimate personal surroundings. A sad, unclean story would soil the freshly-calendered chintzes.

"You say all of us are concerned. If it's a parish story, would you like to tell it in the vestry?"

"I must tell it tonight. Shall we go to bed?"

"You look tired. No place like bed if you have a well-sprung mattress."

She rose to her feet, so did he. He put his arm round her.

"Is the story shameful as well as sad?"

"No, no, but I'd like to tell it in the dark, in—in the silence of the night. I must try to forget that it's autumn. How I wish it were the spring of the year."

She was trembling.

"You have prepared me, Sybil. You are mine, mine in fair and foul weather."

"Thank God I am."

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

## I

NO DOCTOR WILL BE SURPRISED, IF HE READS THIS CHRONICLE, to learn that Eve fell soundly asleep within half an hour of switching off the light. She had the satisfaction of knowing that the task imposed on her had been done, not too well, so she modestly admitted, but *done*. This was an immense relief. When she woke, she was surprised to find that she had slept for eight hours. Before she took her bath she had an hour and a half for quiet meditation. No person, pace Sir Boyle Roche, can be in two places at the same time; but a girl's thoughts travel at such express speed that distance is annihilated. Eve lay in bed, but one foot was in her mother's bedroom and the other in *White House*. Simultaneously her thoughts were focused on both places. Those whom God had joined together had been whirled asunder.

God was not merciful.

Millions have experienced what tormented her. Millions have searched their own hearts and minds. Eve, despite her upbringing, was still intensely individual. She could have passed, creditably, an examination dealing with the history of the Church of England. Miss Poindexter attended to that. Eve was aware that distinguished men, such as Huxley and Darwin, had been called agnostics. She had met in London the silver-tongued King's Counsel who had so nearly ruined Veronica. He had cited triumphantly Colonel Robert Ingersoll, who had answered a question put by a Bishop. "Could you, sir, have improved on God's creation of Man?" Ingersoll had replied: "Certainly. I should have made good health infectious, not disease; I should have made a man inherit not the vices of his father but the virtues of his mother." The K.C. had gone on to say, regardless of Eve's youth and inexperience, that no man of science accepted the Gospel narratives except as oriental imagery. Eve was too young to be impressed. What was good enough for her mother and Uncle Quint was good enough for her. . . .

What had Uncle Quint said when he was preparing her for Confirmation? Yes, she could hear him: "Try to remember this: you may forget God; He will not forget you."

But He had forgotten her.

She was so restless that lying still became unbearable. She

decided to make herself a cup of tea. Mrs. Tagg would not reach the kitchen till half past seven. It was now half past six.

She slipped out of bed.

She looked out of her window. St. Luke's Day had passed; the Saint had not left behind his summer. The fall of the leaf had begun, accelerated by untimely frosts . . . The Michaelmas daisies in the herbaceous border looked sorry for themselves, but Eve could espy Red Admiral butterflies fluttering about them, gallantly braving the nipping air. Her room was one of the two attics which had been made habitable before the move from the Vicarage. Quentin, surveying it, had said, "The Virgin's Bower." Indiscreetly Eve had repeated this comment to the Beetle, who had grinned impudently, saying, "Nowadays a virgin's bower should be on view as 'The Curiosity Shop'." Eve recalled another of Uncle Quentin's remarks. The attics, empty for several years, were as Sybil's predecessor had left them. Obviously he had not considered the comfort of his domestics although sparing no expense on his own quarters—a significant sign of the good old days, so good for Master, so bad for Man. Almost as soon as she had left her bed, Eve's thoughts had swooped from her father and mother to Quentin. Had he passed a sleepless night? Her former bedroom was now his dressing-room. She went to the door, opened it and listened. Quentin was the first in the cottage to have his bath. On leaving the bathroom, he would stand at the foot of a narrow stairway and give Eve a shout. Her mother took her bath at night. . . .

Eve could hear splashings. Quentin never sang in his bath, but often he whistled.

He was whistling now!

Eve gasped. Had she heard a paeon of thanksgiving from an invisible heavenly choir, she could hardly have been more surprised. It was, she reflected, possible that Mum had held her tongue out of consideration for a tired man. She stood still, without slippers or dressing-gown, till she shivered; then she crept back to bed. Five minutes later Quentin tapped at her door.

"Come in."

He kissed her forehead and sat down on her bed.

"Mum told you?" she whispered.

"She did. It took a long time. We had so much and so many to consider. This has been a great joy to you."

He spoke in his ordinary voice. He was fresh from his bath; she could smell the old brown Windsor soap which self-respecting



Veals not only used but kept in store for a couple of years before using—which, according to Aunt Fanny, made it last longer. Eve was thinking that his mind was as clean as his body.

"Uncle Quint, what Daddy was to me as a child I can't tell you."

"Your mother told me last night."

"She knows how I feel; you can't. Because it is such a joy to me, the—the most wonderful thing that has ever happened, I—I realise what a terrible thing it is to you. And I'll tell you, I—I couldn't tell her that I went out of my head with joy. Mum and you ceased to be."

"God brought us back?"

"Almost mercilessly."

He laid his hand on her forehead, a natural caress, but she regarded it as a benediction.

"You felt chastened?"

"I did, I—I swear I did; I felt an ungrateful beast."

"The beast is in all of us. Did you feel as if a Hand had been laid on you? A guiding Hand?"

"No."

"But It was there. Its touch, when we need it most, is our assurance that God never forsakes us; that conviction is mine and I hope and pray it is yours; it is a childlike faith that has made your mother the woman she is, that may make you the woman God intended you to be."

She was awed. He spoke clearly, quietly, with no sanctimonious inflections.

"You are helping me so much. Your hand on my head was His Hand."

"Then before we talk of the present and future, let me say something about the past. Your father is a great gentleman. Ill though he is, he took a long journey to see his child. Be entirely frank with me. Did you love him more than you did your mother?"

"Ye-e-es."

"Has it occurred to you why you did? The explanation is so simple. You never saw him as a father; he never punished or scolded you?"

"Never."

"But your mother had to discipline you. It was her duty. God has to chasten His children. Very few escape the—rod. Your imagination is more vivid than mine. Can you put yourself in her place? She loved you, but day after day she had to take

second place in your heart. How could you know that then? But now, now, perhaps, you can feel as she felt."

"I do . . . I do."

"What happened? Your father had to leave England and you. Your mother, a Londoner, settled down here because your father wanted you to be an open-air girl. And then she got you back."

"Yes, she did. No girl has ever had a sweeter mother."

"Your father has come back to find you a woman——"

"I haven't behaved like a woman——"

"If you are sure of that, all is well."

"Well? What are you going to do?"

"I'm here to tell you. We arranged everything last night. Your mother is asleep. We won't disturb her. She will move from here today and go to your aunt. I shall stay here with you. Mum will remain with her sister till she and I are joined together again. There are matters too sacred to be discussed. And yet they will be discussed in every house in the parish."

"That's so dreadful."

"Is it? Think again. It would be dreadful if a distorted story passed from lip to lip, grotesquely exaggerated. I cannot allow that to happen."

"What can you do to prevent it?"

"Tell the whole truth to my people."

"Where?"

"In God's house."

He left her bed and walked to the window, whence the spire of the church could be seen, less than half a mile away.

## 2

When he turned, she beckoned to him.

"God is with you, Uncle Quint. Has such a thing ever been done before? Did you mean that you were going to tell all that has happened from the pulpit?"

"There is no other place, Eve. I could stand by the lectern. I thought of that. But I must be higher up where everybody can see me. I shall preach no sermon next Sunday. I shall tell our story. If afterwards it is garbled, there will be a hundred and fifty men and women able to refute the garbler. Have your bath. I am going to the garden room."

"It will be cold."

"I shall warm it."

Eve had her bath and dressed leisurely. She forgot her cup of tea. As soon as possible she would see to it that Uncle Quint's fire was blazing.

She found him sitting in front of it.

"I can take Mum to Aunt Fanny this afternoon. I want to go to Guildford this morning to see Larry. May I tell him what you are going to do?"

"Certainly."

"You're as wonderful as he is."

"He may not approve this—this publicity. It's a parson's duty to speak out; a doctor, too often, has to suppress the truth. Will you tell your father?"

"If Larry tells me to. How lucky I am in my friends! Why do silly fools say that a girl can't have men friends?"

Quentin held his tongue.

Sybil remained undisturbed in her bedroom. Shortly before ten, Eve, after the household talk with Mrs. Tagg, drove to *White House*, where one of the nurses opened the front door. It was unnecessary to ask if she could see Anstey. Matron appeared.

"How is Mr. Payson? I have some eggs for him."

"Mr. Payson is much as he was yesterday."

"I'm so glad he's not on a strict diet."

Matron ignored this remark, saying:

"Please go into the consulting-room, Miss Golightly, before you go upstairs. Dr. Anstey wants a word with you. He's at work, but I'll tell him."

"Ah! Matron, he has good news for me. Poor Mr. Payson is better."

She was in the mood to dance about the consulting-room. Instead she stood still, staring at *The Light of the World*. The light came from a lantern. That detail surely had been Inspiration. How often, returning home from school on bleak winter nights, she had paused at the wicket gate to smile at the one window in the cottage that glowed out of the darkness. No curtain was drawn across it by her special request, which Mum had humoured. "When I see that window," Eve had said, "it means home to me." What had the light from the lantern in the picture meant to a pagan world? To Larry, she thought, it was the light of his profession of healing; to Quentin it had deeper significance. . . .

Anstey came in. Eve held out both hands to him.

"Larry, you know what I've been through, but all of them,

Aunt Frances, Uncle Quint and Mum have made things so easy for me. And all of us thank you—you."

He held her hands firmly. His face was inscrutable. Of course it would be. Praise was a penance to such a man. He released her hands and indicated a chair. She sat down; he remained standing on the hearthrug with his back to the engraving. To her, at that moment, he was the Great Physician. Why had he not been baptized—Luke?

"You have told the truth, Eve; so must I. Your father is not responding to treatment; he is weaker."

"Larry, you haven't told me what the treatment is; you feel as Dr. Bishop feels."

He hesitated. A woman, not a girl, was looking up at him. His voice hardened.

"Treatment is an empty word to most people; they expect and demand—results. But an intelligent child could understand what the treatment in this case has been."

He was quite unaware of it but he began to speak dramatically, moved to his marrow by his own heartbreaking disappointment.

"In my body," he said slowly, "there are about four and a half million red blood corpuscles; in your father's body there are less than one million. He came to me tired, worn out. Four years ago, nothing could have been done for him. About that time an injection—we can speak of it as *The Liver Injection*—was discovered and it began to be used in general practice with astonishing results. Now and again it fails. Your father has had this injection once a day for more than a week. I suspected pernicious anaemia from his bad colour and increasing enfeeblement. I tested his blood. That same night I told him that it was pernicious anaemia, and that it could be treated to a successful issue. Apart from the condition of his blood, he was surprisingly sound."

"And now he isn't?"

"I made too sure that certain symptoms, soreness of the tongue, tingling of the limbs, would have been mitigated by now or gone. They have not."

He spoke as a doctor; he looked like a doctor. Larry appeared to have vanished. This affected her and took warmth from her voice.

"You are terribly disappointed?"

Here was his opportunity to speak like a man. Little did she guess that he had steeled himself against betrayal of his feelings. He had prepared himself for an emotional outburst. He had

forgotten that most of us are apes from the womb to the tomb. Eve had steeled herself to listen as calmly as her mother had listened to her on the night before. Eve was playing a part, and playing it too well.

"A doctor," he said drily, "has to expect disappointment. This morning I suggested to your father my wish to call in a London specialist. With what vitality is left in him, he insisted that I should not do so."

"What is wrong?"

"He has no wish to live."

Such a fact should have been kept from a girl who believed ardently that her father coveted life to be lived with her. She listened apathetically to what he went on to say:

"I served in a field hospital during the war. I had cases so desperate that I despaired of them. But a few lived because they refused to die. I had cases, often mere boys, with negligible wounds. They—died. They wanted to die. Some of them said so. You are braver than I took you to be. I never thought I should use a knife on you."

She asked what he took to be a stupid question.

"Can you use a knife on yourself?"

"Surgeons have done so," he replied testily.

"Then I'll tell you that I can knife myself. I've been thinking of myself till I'm sick of myself. I intended to go off with Daddy. Because I wanted him, I made sure he wanted me. If he wants to die, he doesn't want me. He doesn't want anybody. He's too weak to carry on."

"I beg your pardon. Your question seemed flippant. You have spared me the use of the knife; and I'm grateful. Your father travelled here to satisfy himself that you were what he hoped you would be. He told me so. Now he wants your mother."

### 3

This was destined to be a memorable morning for a research worker hitherto engrossed in his special work. Assuredly, he had never studied girls in their varied moods and tenses. Quick to make decisions, he disdained the shilly-shally brigade. He had supposed, not unreasonably, that a meeting between Sybil and Jim would be intolerably painful to her. He had not taken into account a woman's ministering instinct, although he acclaimed a good nurse as the salt of the earth. Quick to learn, he was

learning more from Eve in a few minutes than he had learned from all the young ladies at *Highmount*.

"If Daddy wants Mum, I must fetch her. She's with Aunt Fanny. She'll be here in half an hour."

She stood up.

"One moment. Your father is expecting you. Go to him. Let him think that you think he's stronger"—she nodded—"and find out when he wishes to see your mother."

"Did you tell him that I was going to tell her last night? You did. How did he take it?"

"Apathetically."

He saw her to the foot of the stairs. She ascended them slowly. He wondered if she would look back. No; she was stunned by his bad news. He hurried back to his laboratory and put on his overall, glancing at his workshop.

"Work," he muttered, "the greatest anodyne in the world."

4

Eve expected to find her father in bed. He was in his chair, with a writing-pad on his knee and a fountain pen between his fingers. She kissed him and stood beside him smoothing his hair, so thin and grey. He put down his pen.

"You have told them?" he asked.

"I told Mum. She told Uncle Quint."

"How did they take it?"

"Marvellously."

"Are they se-pa-rating?"

"Mum will stay with Aunt Fanny; Uncle Quint will stay with me. When do you wish to see Mum?"

"So—so painful for her. Get a chair, put it close to mine." She did so. He closed his eyes, lying back. He looked so frail that hope of his recovery left her. His voice was so weak she could hardly hear him. She clutched his hand.

"I—I was a rotten husband. I was not faithful to her when I was in India. When I got back I did an evil thing——"

"Don't tell me!"

"I must. I—I didn't play the game . . . I was damnably jealous of your love for her. Deliberately I made love to you. I wanted you to love me more than you loved your mother. What a sin!"

His voice was hardly audible. Eve was on the edge of an

outburst but Omniscience makes women strong when men are weak. She spoke as calmly as her mother:

"I know . . . I know. Why," she paused almost appalled by the coincidence, "Uncle Quint said what you've said this morning."

"HE knew it?"

"Yes. Daddy this is too much for you and—and me. You ought to be in bed. Now tell me"—her voice brightened—"how are you getting on with your work?" She pointed to the pad still on his knee.

"Not too badly, sweetheart. Back in the green hell, it's so easy to think I'm there. I'm writing it for you. I'm hoping—hoping that——"

Again he closed his eyes.

"Hoping?"

"That . . . you . . . after I've gone . . . will understand why I, after I—es—caped, could—not—come back."

"Perhaps I can."

"No, no. . . . How old are you?"

"Nearly twenty."

He laughed.

"Please don't laugh, darling. I can't bear it."

"I rather hoped that I might find you married."

"Married?" she said. "I'd much sooner look after you. And I shall. Dr. Anstey says you have had a little setback. That's nothing. You are going to be your old self again. There will be no more hateful hush-hush. Mum will be remarried to Uncle Quint; and, maybe, you and I will live together at the cottage."

"A child's dream, Eve."

"Don't you want to live?"

"Eve," he spoke in a whisper. "I—I died in Paraguay."

## 5

Intuition told her that he would die in Guildford—and soon. His breathlessness was alarming.

"You are talking too much. Mum will come this afternoon. To please me, I want you to shave off your beard. I can get a barber. He can do it here."

"Little coaxer still. I don't mind. Can he change the colour of my skin? I look as if I had yellow-jack."

His colour, although she didn't know it, had been his death warrant to Anstey. The injections, for some reason which wasn't

reason to him, had not affected the red blood corpuscles. A blood-test taken the evening before had confirmed apprehension. Trying desperately to talk lightly, she said:

"I have make-up in my bag."

He answered almost gaily:

"Keep it there. It's funny . . . Women who make up their faces, even in railway carriages, can't make up their minds."

He chuckled.

"I was only joking. I must leave you in a moment. Before I go, are you sure you are strong enough to see Mum?"

"I can answer for myself."

"I can answer for her. She loves you."

"Impossible . . . unthinkable."

"Men never understand women. I know one who does: Uncle Quint. He loved Mum before we learnt you were dead. She didn't love him, not—not as she loved you."

"How can you know that?"

"Because I'm a woman. I've thought, being a conceited fool, that I—I egged her on to marry him. He wanted her desperately. They worked together in the village. . . . I supposed that some day I might marry. Then she would be left alone. He asked her to marry him . . . She refused. . . . I prayed that she would marry him. She did. She couldn't give him, I daresay, what she gave you, but she did give all she had to give."

"Yes; she's a great giver."

"And so is he."

Presently she left him. When she turned at the door to smile encouragingly, he blew to her the kiss that was obligatory when she was a child.

Matron saw her before she left *White House*.

"How did you find him?" she asked.

"Busy writing. I'm sending round a barber."

"When you first knew him, was he clean-shaven?"

"Yes; and he had no beard when my mother saw him last. She is coming this afternoon about three."

"Dr. Anstey knows she is coming?"

"Oh yes."

Matron nodded. One of the nurses had spoken of Mr. Payson as the Mystery Man, which provoked a rebuke from Authority. Nothing mysterious about him except his baffling disease. Obviously he was an Englishman who had lived in wild places for many years who had acquired an American accent and retained his courteous manners, poor old fellow.



The short talk with Matron had constrained Eve to play her part. She knew that her father was weaker, but profound faith in Anstey sustained her. He had suffered a relapse because he had dreaded the revelation of the truth. So had she; but the truth had prevailed miraculously. The two persons most concerned had confronted it valiantly. . . .

She hurried to the nearest barber's shop, did her shopping and raced back to *Meadowsweet*. St. Luke had not been idle. The ambient air was warmer; the Surrey hills were green again. The wind blew from the south-west instead of the north-east. Yes; summer was kissing Limpley good-bye. . . .

She went into the kitchen to deliver her parcels and to hear from Mrs. Tagg that Sybil was still in her bedroom.

"Ellun took up 'er breakfus', Miss. Knowin' madam's 'abits better than I know me own, I did a spot o' worryin'. But, Lor', she's orlright. Needs an 'oliday, I sez."

"She's going to have it, Mrs. Tagg. This afternoon I'm taking her to *The Gables*, where Aunt Frances will keep an eye on her for a few days."

"Yer right, Miss. Yer Auntie's heye is more than an heye, it's an hobservatory."

"Where is Mr. Woodward?"

"What a questching . . . ! At work, as I be."

This was a hint. Eve left the kitchen and sped upstairs.

6

"I've settled everything, Mum."

"Settled" is a word dear to youthful lips. Sybil never used it. She was dressed; her suit-case lay on the bed, half full.

"How did you find him?"

"A—a wee bit unsettled. I think I settled him. He'll be as calm as you are, dearest, after he's seen you. And," she added triumphantly, "I've coaxed him to get rid of his hateful beard."

"Tell me what you say is—settled."

"I take you to see him at three. You won't stay too long, will you, this first visit? Then I'll drive you to Aunt Fanny's. I shall take good care of Uncle Quint whilst you're away. And you won't be away long."

"Have you 'settled' that?"

"In a sort of way, I have. Five minutes ago I found a wire from the Beetle. Listen:

"Have seen Alaric. Confident he can speed things up. Stout fellow he is. Beetle."

"That is good news."

Eve put the telegram into her pocket.

"I'll help you with your packing, but I'm madly excited over what you've settled about next Sunday."

"Are you? Quentin *settled* that. He says it's the only way, and I think as he does."

"Mum, I shall be in church. Will you?"

"Yes."

"I am proud to be your daughter. Won't it be a dreadful ordeal for you?"

"No. You have no reason to be proud of me; you can be as proud as I am of a man who always considers others before himself. His people will be looking at him, not at me. I think I must take two suit-cases to *The Gables*. Alaric may not be able to speed things up."

"I just know he will."

"What else have you settled?"

"Only this, darling. I'll take you to Daddy's room, but I won't go in with you. I'll wait for you in Larry's consulting-room or in Matron's room."

"This kind friend of ours will be with you?"

"Not a hope," she frowned. "He—he wasn't too kind this morning. He's upset because Daddy has had a little setback. I say, he'll stride along after your first meeting with him is over."

"Will he be in bed?"

"I hope so. All men are so silly about that. They won't take things lying down. It's much warmer, but you'd better wear your old fur coat. Where is the other suit-case?"

7

At luncheon, Eve's soul sang within her. Apart from what she deemed to be an inevitable lack of response to treatment, *things*, as she vaguely termed them, had indeed settled themselves marvellously. God was merciful. . . .

She could detect no distress, no uneasiness, in the eyes of Quentin and Sybil, even when Ellen was out of the room. The Vicar talked "shop". He could do this admirably. His daily work was so dear to him that it was never shop-soiled. He could

make Aunt Fanny laugh, when he dealt humorously with petty shortcomings and transgressions. Nothing daunted him. *Sufficient unto the day is the joy thereof* was his slogan. However, he made a comment which arrested Eve's attention, when he spoke lightly of Limpley's oldest inhabitant, a nonagenarian, to whom he had taken that morning a gill of "white satin".

"The old dear said to me: 'Pa'son, I be gettin' on nicely wi' my dyin', a noosance, I dessay, to me own darter, but not to meself.' Must write a sermon on this, Sybil."

"What did she mean by 'nicely'?" Eve asked.

"Exactly what she said. She's in possession of all her faculties. She has an amazing memory. She's worked all her life. Now, she can sit still. And, mind you, she is 'nice' in its fastidious sense. She draws down the blinds between herself and the worries which beset her when she was up and about. She is sliding comfortably out of life. If we could all go that way, fearlessly, fully assured, as she is, of a happier life to come——"

"I'm sure she thanked you nicely for the gin."

Quentin chuckled.

"When she thanked me, she said that her daughter, who is seventy, was not quite old enough to add gin to her cup o' tea."

After luncheon, Quentin hustled off. Sybil's suit-cases were packed. Eve's car stood at the wicket gate. Mother and daughter sat together in the parlour. . . .

"Mum," Eve said desperately, "you can't feel as you look."

"I do. If I allowed myself to—to wilt, it might affect your father. You can't feel as he does, but I can. The change in him makes you think that he has changed. I refuse to believe that he has. As a very young girl what so attracted me to him was his gaiety. My home life had been dull; so had his. But he had this in common with Quentin: he laughed when I wanted to cry. I used to tell him that he was an everlasting 'feast'."

"I must prepare you. He is at such a low ebb."

"He must be, but his mind couldn't change. Just before he left England, he would come home, kiss me, and say in the jolliest voice: 'I lost a packet today, but I'll get it all back and more too—tomorrow.' I read a book about Bristol the other day. Sebastian Cabot was a Bristol worthy. They have still a society they call *Merchant Venturers*. I've always thought of your father as a Gentleman Adventurer. He—he adventured here, ill though he was, to see you."

"You may be right."

"It pleases me that he can write about those sad years. It's

proof of what I tell you, proof of a vitality of mind which will be his to the end."

"Have I his vitality?"

"You have; and—and it will never fail you on one condition: you must try to realise that it is a gift, one of the greatest gifts of the Spirit. It was not given to me."

"Maybe you were given something better. I'm beastly to everybody when things go wrong. You smile and keep on smiling."

"So does our Oldest Inhabitant."

"Every blessed day I tell myself how lucky I am to have a mother like you."

"Ah! We'll call you a Lady Adventurer. I do hope that Dr. Anstey will be with you when I'm with Daddy."

"I told you he was too busy. After all, why should he be with me?"

Sybil evaded the direct question. Quentin and she had both hoped that friendship between the pair would develop into a warmer sentiment.

"If he is not too busy, he will be with you."

"I—I don't know whether I want him to be with me or not."

"He may want to be with you."

"I jolly well know that the Beetle would come to me even if he were stalking in Sutherland."

Sybil had not been told that the Beetle had offered what was left of a misspent life to Miss Eve Golightly.

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

### I

JIM WAS IN BED WHEN SYBIL ENTERED HIS ROOM. SHE BENT down to kiss his forehead before a word was spoken. For an instant each looked steadily at the other. With the removal of the beard his features seemed to have changed little. A chair was near the bed; she sat down.

"Where's the little Petlet?" he asked.

"With the Matron. I—I should have known you anywhere, Jim."

He answered lightly:

"Not a bit the worse for wear, am I? And you? I can still see the girl I married thousands of years ago. I felt so old this

morning. The mere sight of you makes me young again. What was the name of that fellow who came back, Eugene Aram?"

"*Enoch Arden.*"

"Who wrote it?"

"Tennyson. I read it this morning when I was alone."

"I read it when I was a boy at Eton. All I remember is that Enoch came back, saw his wife and children, and passed out before they knew he was alive."

"When did you recall this?"

"After Eve left me about half past eleven."

"At that moment I was reading the poem. We were thinking of the same thing at the same time."

"Did any lines in it apply to us?"

"One: the wife, Annie, told the man, Philip, whom she married, that he had been God's good angel in her house, but she refused to marry him till another year had passed."

"Eve speaks of Quentin Woodward as a good man so—so different from a good fellow. I know why you married him."

"I'm married to you, Jim. Quentin told me last night that I could go back to you."

He replied with agitation:

"Unthinkable——! You're bearing his child. Anstey told me. Do I begrudge him his child or—or you? Not I."

"Jim, you are almost breathless. For my sake, speak more quietly."

"We won't talk of the present. Talk to me of the yesterdays, not pale to me."

She took his hand.

"They are not pale to me. Do you remember how I blushed when you kissed me before you asked me to marry you?"

His eyes danced. For a second youth shone out of them.

"Sib, you asked me to marry you."

"I—I didn't."

"Your memory is not as good as mine. Miss Sybil Veal told Mister Golightly that gentlemen did not kiss girls to whom they were not engaged. Of course that forced my hand. I hated to be thought a cad."

His voice was incredibly youthful. Perhaps youth is a greater wizard than Merlin. This unhappy pair were one again.

"And then," he went on, "I had to face your pater. What a Veal was there! Could I support his dear daughter without help from him? Being a gifted liar, I swore by the seven gods of Clusium that I could, and for a happy year or two I did. Bless

your heart! You blushed when you told me Eve was coming, and how sure you were that IT would be a boy."

"You look ever so much better. Go on!"

"You went to work at the layette, and hid the tiny garments if a visitor called. I remember the first hat I bought you as a surprise. Surprise it was to me; you hated it; so I sent it back to the shop without telling you——"

"And I wasted an hour looking for it."

They laughed.

"I remember another line in *Enoch Arden*: 'And merrily ran the years, seven happy years.'"

"We had our innings. I thought of it in green hell."

She laid a finger on his lip.

He took her hand and looked at it, half frowning, half smiling, then he hid his scarred hands under the coverlet.

"Sorry I mentioned hell. Get thee behind me, Satan, whilst my wife is with me."

"You haven't changed, Jim. I used to call you Peter Pan"

"I called you a slippery slink, because you kept your temper when I lost mine."

They recalled other trivial incidents. Presently Sybil told him that she had asked Eve to join them when a half hour was up.

"The Matron has been told that Mr. Payson is an old friend. Eve never stays more than half an hour. I'll come again to-morrow. After next Sunday, you'll be Mr. Golightly."

"After next Sunday?"

As calmly as she could, she told him what Quentin had decided to do. He said drily:

"Not a man in a million would have the courage to do it."

"You can't guess why he is doing it?"

"No."

"He plans to live at the Vicarage. I shall be with Frances; Eve will be at *Meadowsweet* with you. Keep this little plan to yourself."

"*Meadowsweet*? Who gave your cottage that name?"

"I did."

"I'm sure you hated leaving London?"

"You wanted Eve to live in the country."

"Did it hurt you when I wrote to her first."

"It did a little."

"But you guessed that I bolted because the hounds of the law were at my heels. I told Popham to tell you."

"He—he spared me, Jim."

To her dismay he was breathing less easily.

"You are in pain?"

"No; I've had no pain. One prick a day. Sybil, wishful thinking has been my bane. Do you really think that I could live with Eve in your cottage when Woodward and you are remarried?"

"I—I don't know. Quentin thinks it the sensible thing to do; and he's telling his people everything, hoping that they will be as sensible as he is."

"It's a dream," he whispered.

## 2

Eve came in. Her delight at seeing her father as she remembered him, and her conviction that he was mending, was uplifting. She sat down on the end of the bed, curling one slim leg under her skirt.

"I've been alone with Matron. I told her you were my father; she was sweet to me. And we needn't hurry away. We can have tea if we want to."

"You haven't seen Dr. Anstey?" Sybil asked.

"No; he's in his old lab. Matron won't say a word till next Monday. Does Daddy know about Sunday?"

"Yes."

"You two look so much happier than I expected."

"Trinity in unity," murmured her father. "I am yesterday, Mum is today and you're the child of tomorrow."

He smiled at her.

"He's tired, Eve; he has talked too much."

"Tea will do us all good."

Jim closed his eyes.

"I think we ought to go," Sybil said.

"You say that because Aunt Fanny is expecting you. I can ring her up."

"Stay a little longer," murmured Jim drowsily.

By the grace of God, they stayed.

Did a dying man have premonition that his minutes were numbered? Sybil adjusted his pillows, making a sign to Eve to hold her tongue. Leaving the head of the bed, she moved to the foot of it.

"He's asleep," she whispered.

Both women were startled when a boy's voice was heard.

"Sold again, both of you. Never was I so wide awake. Before you go," his voice became weak, "I've something to say. Butcher's business. M'made quite a little b-bit. Tongue sore. Tingling all over too. Never mind. Small p-pile—few thousand bucks, honestly earned." He was staring as he spoke at Eve, blinking at her. "I can t-trust you, Doctor. Papers in my bag. I've left the lot to my wife, Mrs. Golightly. C-c-can't speak p-plainly. You hear me, Doc?"

"Yes," Eve faltered.

"B-b-best wife in the world."

He had raised his head a little. Both women were spell-bound. His voice hardened:

"I—I feel queer. Somebody has their arms round me, holding me too tight. I can stick it, Doc. I—I want my wife."

His head fell back.

Sybil's arms were round him, when he spoke for the last time:

"Is it you, Sib?"

"I'm holding you, Jim."

He sighed; a smile flickered across his face. It was the end.

### 3

Pernicious anaemia had not killed him. He died of cardiac thrombosis: a clot of blood had assailed his heart. His body, in a plain oak coffin, was taken to *Meadowsweet*, where it lay in the parlour. Within forty-eight hours millions read of James Golightly's resurrection. Gentlemen of the Press were received by Quentin Woodward at the Vicarage, where he gave to them what he had written as a *précis* for the Sunday sermon.

When Quentin remarried Sybil, his people filled Limpley Church. Strangers from Guildford lined the village street. As before, bride and groom travelled to Bournemouth for a second honeymoon, leaving Eve at *The Gables*. The Victorian word "settled" was dear to Aunt Fanny. To her, Eve had become a too lively note of interrogation. She had lost her sense of direction. Such a lamentable loss never happened to a Veal. . . . Milly had said: "Our young lady don't quite know where she is." Then the faithful soul had added: "She'll do, sooner or later, what she wants to do."

Sybil had told her sister that the Beetle had proposed for the third time. Eve had said to her mother: "He's a dear, but I don't love him and I never shall." This, however, was no dis-



appointment to Mrs. Crampton. Alone in her drawing-room, she stared at her husband's portrait, wondering what he would say if he were alive. Eve was confronting three possibilities: She could live on at *Meadowsweet*; she could play daughter to her aunt; she could become a member of her father's family. . . .

The smile of a sometime City Father was non-committal; he seemed to be saying: "Don't impose your wishes on another, my dear."

Anstey, after his patient's funeral, wrote a letter:

*Dear Eve,*

*You and I have suffered a great disappointment. We made too sure that your father would recover a measure of the health which had been his. I recall telling you that the wish to live might work a miracle. I upset you when I told you, perhaps indiscreetly, that he had no wish to live.*

*Most sincerely your friend,*

*C. Anstey.*

*P.S. You will be glad to hear, I know, that I am happier about my work. Light is glimmering ahead.*

Why didn't a friend sign himself Larry? Veal sense told Eve that she had wronged a friend when she resented plain speech from him. And she was too inexperienced to realise that women turn from a man whom they treat unfairly. Indeed, they may dislike him, if they happen to see little of him. The postscript was a thorn in her side. Work, she decided too hastily, was his apple. Work was her apple.

She decided, taking counsel with none, to join the County Hospital as a probationer. But she was dismally aware that her decision might distress others. It was certain to provoke Aunt Fanny to wrath. Once more, greatly daring, she sped to the conviction that she must shiver the first lance as soon as opportunity presented itself. . . .

Opportunity became importunity when she found herself alone with Mrs. Crampton after dinner on the day when Quentin remarried Sybil. Before the encounter began, Eve was basking in Aunt Fanny's smiles. With the coffee, Milly brought in two small glasses of Benedictine. At dinner, bride and groom had been toasted in champagne. Mrs. Crampton raised her glass.

"Let us drink," she said superbly, "to OURSELVES, and" she glanced at the alderman's portrait, "to our HOME."

Sarah Siddons—so Eve reflected—had taken the stage!

Let her hold it for a minute or two.

Already Aunt Fanny had soaped her ways. With becoming authority she had insisted that a brief week at Bournemouth was not enough to "readjust" marital relations so cruelly severed. Eve, she pointed out, could stay at *The Gables*, where (as at *Meadowsweet*) two would be company. Eve had made no protest. She believed for the moment that her mother and her aunt were indulging in wishful thinking. What tincture of Veal was in her constrained her to hold her tongue. She had successfully dissembled her unhappiness. She believed that friendship with Anstey had been broken.

Mrs. Crampton went on:

"You're honest, Eve. Did you hope that your dear mother would leave Mr. Woodward and live with her first husband and you?"

"Never, never did I think that possible. I—I thought Daddy and I might live together."

"Yes, yes, so natural. You felt that he needed you?"

"I did. But at the last he needed Mother."

"I've not forgotten my own girlhood, dear. I can say to you that I married your uncle because he—he needed me. I understand you."

She smiled maternally. Her smile seemed to say: "Don't you know that I need you?" Honesty triumphed. Eve in her turn asked a question.

"Did you understand others when you were my age?"

Aunt Fanny hesitated. To Eve's surprise, she said after a pause:

"I tried to do so. Looking back, I recall, not without amusement," she smiled pleasantly, "that such efforts were now and again disconcerting——"

"Disconcerting?"

"Well, well, shall we put it like this? Age has one enormous advantage over youth. At nineteen I knew my own mind, such as it was, but I did not realise at twenty-five it would inevitably change. When I did, so to speak, jump out of myself, I left myself befogged and bewildered."

"That," Eve admitted, "is exactly how I feel. I do want to be honest with you. I—I loathe upsetting you. I was so tempted to marry my poor old Beetle just because he said he needed me. When you were so ill, I was happy playing nurse because you needed me. I know that Mum and Uncle Quint don't need me.

I know, too, that the little work I do in the village is too little. I couldn't be happy on the joywheel. I suppose I feel as Larry feels——"

"Larry?"

"Dr. Anstey. His work is everything to him, everything."

Her voice hardened. It is possible rather than probable that Mrs. Crampton was enlightened. It occurred to her, *en passant*, as Mrs. Wilmot would have said, that Dr. Anstey, apart from the practice of his noble profession, was an engaging personality.

"Everything, Eve? I don't believe it."

"It's true."

"Tch! He needs a wife. Now, what have you to say which will upset ME. Out with it."

"I want to be a nurse."

"M'm. . . . Did Dr. Anstey put that notion into your pate?"

"I—I think you did."

"Nonsense. We'll thrash this out. Did Dr. Anstey ask you to play nurse at the *White House*?"

"No. I shall have to serve the usual apprenticeship at our County Hospital."

"It's a call, is it?"

"I think so; I'm sure it is."

"Have you told your mother?"

"No. I had to tell you first."

"Good girl! I *am* upset; but I refuse to bark at you; and I couldn't bite you. Please give me time to think this over."

"Auntie, you're too wonderful——"

"You expected me to boil over? What an end to a memorable day——! Ring the bell. Milly must clear away, and then——"

"And then?"

"I shall cool myself off in bed."

Left alone with her thoughts, Eve was sensible that she had won a Pyrrhic victory. She laid out a Patience which she dealt with too impatiently. Aunt Fanny had retreated to her bedroom majestically but unduly flushed. A sleepless night might be hers unless she took an opiate. Unquestionably she was upset. The word concussion obtruded itself. The wish to please, the happy thought that pleasing others turned a giver into a getter, glimmered fitfully. She smiled wryly when she recalled one of Mim's humorous remarks about the goats at *Highbourn*: "Most of 'em are cockeyed."

Shuffling together two packs of cards, Eve had said to herself: "If this comes out, I must cut loose." It did not come out. She

put away the cards and glanced at the not-too-easy chair used by Mrs. Crampton. After a pause, she sat on it stiffly erect. She hoped that Aunt Fanny's ripe experience might enrich her inexperience. Within five minutes she fell asleep, tired out after an exciting day. She awoke to find Milly at her side.

"I made sure, Miss, you had gone to bed."

"What time is it?"

"Past eleven."

"I'll go to bed."

"Very good, Miss. Happy dreams! If I may venture to say so, things have turned out for the best, as," she added piously, "they generally do. It's such a comfort to all of us that you're here with your auntie."

"She went to bed more than an hour ago. You have been with her. . . . Did—did she say anything to you about me?"

"Not a word, Miss, but she appeared, well, flustered, and no wonder! She took three aspirins; never knew her to take more than two."

Eve said indiscreetly:

"Auntie is lucky to have you; she needs you more than she needs me."

"Oh, no. Sweet of you to say so, but blood is thicker than water."

4

Milly's conviction that Mrs. Crampton needed her niece kept Eve awake till past midnight. Then she achieved what is so dear to all of us—compromise. The decision to cut loose could be postponed. A dogged determination to go her own way too hastily would provoke opposition and remonstrances from all her friends. Nearly everybody would be "displeased".

She awoke refreshed in mind and body, reflecting gaily that the lines of least resistance along which she proposed to travel leisurely were very pleasant. Anne, who called her, bringing a cup of tea, said that Madam had slept well.

However, in the dining-room, Aunt Fanny's chair stood alone at the head of the table. When Milly appeared, a message was delivered:

"Madam is breakfasting in bed, Miss. She hopes that you will read Prayers."

"Milly——!"

"Madam is indisposed."

"Her heart——?"

"She told me it was quite all right."

"I'll go to her——"

Milly's face, as usual, was inscrutable. Eve exclaimed vehemently:

"You're pretending with me; I—I know you are. And I hate being 'spared' and humbugged. I—I could slap you, Milly."

"I could slap myself, Miss. It comes to this. Yesterday your dear auntie did too much. You can go to her after breakfast, her wish. She told me to hold me tongue when I asked her if she'd been breathless again."

"Damn family prayers!"

"Miss——!"

"I'll get through to Dr. Anstey, here and now."

"I got through to him ten minutes ago."

"I'm sorry, Milly. You—you dared do that on your own?"

"No, Miss; I know my place. Madam wants to see him; and he'll be here at ten to the tick. If I may say so, I'm fair downed by her consideration for us."

"What can you mean?"

"Well, she said: 'I'm sending for Doctor because he'll tell you there's nothing the matter with ME.'"

"You believe that?"

"I wish I did," Milly replied miserably.

"If Auntie expects me to read Prayers, I'll do it."

She did it, perfunctorily. The maids filed in, looking like mutes at a funeral. When they filed out, Eve was on the edge of tears. However, Veal sense whispered that she couldn't face Anstey fasting. She would have the truth from him. Accordingly she choked down a poached egg and a rasher of bacon. Milly came back to tell her that Aunt Fanny was asleep. She asked one question:

"Will you see Doctor when he comes?"

"No. I must pull myself together. Do you know why I read Prayers?"

"Your duty, Miss."

"It is my duty to obey Auntie. From this moment on, nothing must upset her."

"That's right. I've a word of cheer. When I peeped in, she was sleeping like a child, with—with a smile on her face."

"I'll see Dr. Anstey in the drawing-room after he has seen Aunt Fanny."

Milly withdrew.

## 5

Eve's apprehensions were not mitigated during the wretched half hour after Anstey's arrival. She knew that he never scamped his duties, disdaining small-talk with a patient. When the moment came, he would ask questions which she would have to answer. He would deal faithfully with her wish to become a nurse. Accusing herself, as she did, of rushing her fences, she would admit as much to him. And then, if he were indeed a friend, sympathy would be forthcoming. . . .

He came into the room. When he held out his hand, she gripped it.

"I'm prepared for bad news," she faltered. "I'm the cause of this breakdown. Last night I was horribly selfish. I—I stabbed poor Auntie. I can abase myself to you."

To her amazement he laughed.

"I've good news for you, Eve."

"If you lie to me, I shall never forgive you. You have been with Aunt Fanny for an eternity."

"I have satisfied myself there is nothing wrong."

"You swear that?"

"I do."

"Larry——"

"Yes?"

"I—I feel giddy; I believe I'm going to faint."

He had to support her to the sofa. She collapsed on it, closing her eyes, trembling as if assailed by a palsy. The appeal of weakness to strength was irresistible.

"My bag is in the hall; I can give you a pick-me-up."

"Don't leave me."

His fingers were on her wrist. To his relief, her pulse was strong but intermittent. He feared hysteria.

"I shan't leave you till you are yourself again. Do you feel cold?"

"Yes; what a rotten weakling I am."

"No weakling would admit that. Your voice is firmer. In a minute or two I shall try to satisfy your curiosity. If there is nothing wrong with Mrs. Crampton, you must be wondering why she sent for me?"

"I am."

"She is unhappy about you."

"Then you know what I want to do?"

"She told me."

"And you disapprove?"

"She thinks that the drudgery at our County Hospital may be too much for you."

"Perhaps she hopes it will. I'm tougher than she thinks."

"You have tried to please others——"

"Playing to the gallery?"

"Never, never! You are the daughter of the most unselfish woman I've ever met. Eve, you said you were glad I'm here; and I'm here to help you if I can; surely you know that?"

She winced.

"I do, I do, Larry. I've been miserable because I thought I'd lost your friendship."

"Let me say what I said to your aunt a few minutes ago. Because you have tried indefatigably to please others, it is time you pleased yourself; so I made this suggestion. I am keen, desperately keen, to offer you work in the *White House*. There you can try yourself out half the time as nurse. In the afternoon you can help me in the lab."

"I jump at such a chance. Done——! Wait . . . . On your honour, Larry, did this suggestion come first from you or from Auntie?"

"On my honour—from me. It will be an experiment——"

"And—and a great adventure, devastating if I fail to make good."

"You'll make good. You will dine and sleep here. You have your car."

"Auntie is happier?"

"I swear she is."

"I wanted to help you in your work, because it is everything to you."

At the moment he was discreet enough to say quietly:

"You are mistaken; it is most emphatically not everything to me."

With this assurance he took leave of her. She hastened to Mrs. Crampton's bedroom.

"Do you know," she asked, "what Milly said before breakfast? Maybe she's a minor prophet. She believes that everything has turned out for the best, and so do I."

Aunt Fanny chuckled.







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